

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES AS HEALING AGENTS FOR THE FIRST- AND  
SECOND-GENERATIONS OF CHINESE AMERICAN WOMEN WITHIN  
THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST (SDA) COMMUNITY

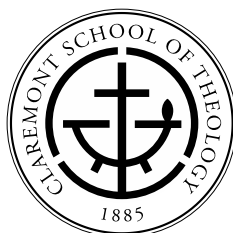
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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Philosophy

by  
Angela Heun Li  
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This dissertation completed by

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## ABSTRACT

### SPIRITUAL PRACTICES AS HEALING AGENTS FOR THE FIRST- AND SECOND- GENERATIONS OF CHINESE AMERICAN WOMEN WITHIN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST (SDA) COMMUNITY

By Angela Heun Li

Many first- and second-generation Chinese American women within the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) community are wounded while struggling to find their voices and identities during their transition into Euro American culture. For this reason, they have a profound need for support from their faith tradition. They require restoration from social burdens, liminal living, guilt, and shame.

My dissertation draws attention to Chinese American Adventist women by acknowledging their need for care and healing. It proposes additional spiritual practices to tend to these needs, and to help nourish their religious lives.

I ground this dissertation in Christian theology and the thought of Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu. This allows me to discuss various feminist theologies, and attend to these women's religious lives and healings, by suggesting myriad spiritual and pragmatic practices. The dissertation concludes with suggestions about the future directions such healing and liberating practices could take. It also affirms the continued need to create a cultural context which fosters the expression of their self-expression, creativity, compassion, liberation, and flourishing.

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Finally, I give all the glory to God, my ultimate source of love and compassion, guidance, empowerment, and support.

## DEDICATION

To God be the glory.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to understand emotional and spiritual needs, struggles, and challenges of middle-class Chinese American immigrant women through a critical lens of feminist theologies. Its secondary purpose is to locate the source and gaps of those needs by examine their cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices. Its third and final purpose is to offer nurturing spiritual and religious living practices, and healing resources to these women within the confine of Adventist beliefs.

To this end, I have thought deeply about whether I should include an ancient Chinese cultural resource known as the “Way.” After much discernment, I have come to believe that the inclusion of this Daoist philosophy will not compromise the Christian framework of my search. Rather, I assert that its presence will complement and enrich it, because Daosim can be read as an affirmation that God inspired the Chinese people long before Christianity was ever introduced to it.

As a faithful Adventist minister, I write from a place of non-judgement and with a passion for wholeness. As a good shepherd, I have realized my responsibility is to take care of the lambs of God. As a Chinese American mother, I have served as a living cultural bridge for my two children, who traverse aspects of both societies. This has left me with a desire for immigrant children to thrive not only physically and intellectually, but also emotionally and spiritually. Wholeness is a gift from God, and it is the desire of all Seventh-day Adventists.

With this study, I hold up a candle in my corner and hope by doing so, to inspire more Adventist leaders to do the same in their own communities.

Despite these good intentions, I recognize how difficult it is to write about Asia in general terms. The number of regions and nations-states it encompasses are staggering, and include Central Asia (The Republic of Kazakhstan, The Republic of Uzbekistan, The Republic of Tajikistan, The Republic Turkmenistan, and The Republic of Kyrgyzstan), East Asia (The Peoples Republic of China, Hong Kong (Special Region of the People's Republic of China), Macau (Special Region of the People's Republic of China), Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, The State of Japan, The Republic of China, and Mongolia), South Asia (Islamic State of Afghanistan, Islamic State of Pakistan, The Republic of India, Republic of Maldives, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, Kingdom of Bhutan, and People's Republic of Bangladesh), Southeast Asia (Nation of Brunei, Kingdom of Cambodia, Republic of Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Laos, Malaysia, Republic of the Union of Myanmar, The Republic of Philippines, Republic of Singapore, Kingdom of Thailand, Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, and Socialist Republic of Vietnam), and Western Asia (The Republic of Armenia, Republic of Azerbaijan, Kingdom of Bahrain, Georgia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Iraq, State of Israel, Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan, The State of Kuwait, The Lebanese Republic, the Gaza Strip, The Sultanate of Oman, The State of Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, The Syrian

Arab Republic, Republic of Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and The Republic of Yemen).<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, I echo some Asian American scholars and theologians in protesting against writing about Asia in a general sense, since it is the largest, most populous, and diverse continent on the planet. They call us to focus on each region's particularities. It is inadequate to write about the Chinese culture in a general sense, as they comprise diverse peoples who have resided and enculturated not only the vast territory that is China proper, but also many areas far beyond this mainland. This dissertation does identity and discusses "Chinese immigrants" as a group sharing many common characteristics. Nevertheless, it seeks throughout its chapters, to balance a holistic view of the Chinese diasporic experience without making the topic of this dissertation too narrow.

### **Chapter Summaries**

Building on the foundation described above, Chapter One overviews this dissertation with information on its research questions and background. In general, all Chinese American immigrant Adventist families encounter tensions because of traditions, cultural transitions, gender role imbalances, and religious shifts—and these issues are only exacerbated by their experience of moving to the US. They face additional challenges as they live through marginalization with few or no religious resources to help with their emotional and spiritual healing. Among these immigrants, I focus on the particular needs of women.

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<sup>1</sup> "How many countries in Asia?" World Meters, accessed April 15, 2017, <http://www.worldometers.info/geography/how-many-countries-in-asia/>.

Chapter Two describes my practical theological framework, which is in dialogue with Euro American and Asian American feminist theology, postcolonial feminist theology, and the scriptural teachings of Jesus Christ and the “Way.” The past two decades have seen an enormous transition, with many Asian feminist theologians relocating themselves as Asian American feminist theologians. I see myself also in that group. Feminist theologies play an important role in my work because they share a common goal: liberating women as they struggle with and against oppression.

Chapter Three summarizes my observations about various feminist theological reflections on women’s healing. These reflections include European and North American, Latina, womanist, and Asian/Asian American feminist theologies. This chapter concludes by giving a theological reflection on Asian feminist theology.

Chapter Four briefly describe the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church by summarizing its history, core beliefs, culture, and practices. With this in mind, it explains how the history of Chinese Christianity has shaped the experience of Chinese Adventists, especially female ones. Special attention is also paid to Adventist views on women and women’s leadership in North America, and specifically in Chinese diaspora in the US. To that end, this chapter surveys two recent North American Adventist studies, which have identified sources of religious discontent among Adventist young adults. The chapter concludes by discussing the current gaps in spiritual development, nurturing, and healing for Adventist Chinese and Chinese American women.

Chapter five presents a thick description of the interconnected challenges of liminal living on Chinese American Adventist women who are struggling under the heavy influence of Confucianism and the as-yet undiscovered need for liberation. As women's headship and authority is controversial in Adventist community, this chapter explores and describes the challenges of being a female spiritual leader in that community. A personal narrative is also included in this chapter. Observations regarding the lack of spiritual practices and healing agents in Adventist Chinese American community forms an important part of this chapter.

As the need for healing becomes prevalent in Chinese American Adventist community, there is a pressing – but largely overlooked – need for Chinese American Adventist churches to provide tools to bring forth transformation among the women. Chapter six describes the role of healing, the possibilities of the Compassion Practice, and other processes of spiritual and emotional healing for Adventist Chinese American immigrant women and their daughters.

Chapter seven concludes by proposing a weaving together of Chinese culture and spiritual practices as healing agents for the Adventist Chinese American women. The reflectivity of this paper is discussed, and it ends by proposing additional future directions that might create a brighter outlook for Chinese American Christian women.

## About the Study

### *The Culture of the Early Chinese People*

Chinese culture eventually emerged as the dominant cultural force in East Asia. Chinese history, its language and writing system, its literature, philosophy, martial arts, cuisine, visual arts, architecture, music, and dance are respected by people throughout Asia.<sup>2</sup> Classical Chinese was the standard ancient language and written system for thousands of years. It was used mostly by scholars and intellectuals, as it was a difficult language to master. The writing can be viewed as a form of art, and indeed the calligraphy of famous artists has become greatly prized.

The writing system is what has allowed Chinese literature to flourish for such a long time. The earliest classic work in Chinese, dated to around 1000 BCE was the *I Ching*, or, “Book of Changes.” Later, philosophical works such as Confucius's *Analects* and Laozi's *Tao Te Ching* blossomed during the Warring States period (500-200 BCE). Dynastic histories were regularly written between 109 and 191 BCE, beginning with Sima Qian's Seminal Records of the Grand Historian. The blossoming of poetry and other literature was rapid during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), and this growth spawned the creation of printmaking and movable type during the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE), long before it was invented in Europe. The Four Classical Novels of Chinese literature were written later during the Ming (1368-1644 CE) and Qing (1644-1911/12 CE)

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<sup>2</sup> “Chinese History Guide,” Artsmia, accessed September 10, 2017, <http://archive.artsmia.org/art-of-asia/history/chinese-dynasty-guide.cfm>.

Dynasties. The emperors of each dynasty sponsored and endorsed scholarly reviews on the classic literature in both printed and handwritten form. Noble families often participated in these discussions as well. Chinese philosophers, writers, and poets were greatly respected, and they played significant roles in preserving and promoting the Imperial Chinese culture.<sup>3</sup>

A central part of Chinese culture has long been its martial arts. Their origin was often attributed to the need for self-defense and hunting. Military knowledge of hand-to-hand combat and weapons practice already existed in ancient China, and over the course of the centuries, these techniques evolved into several hundred different fighting styles. According to legend, Chinese martial arts originated during the Xia Dynasty (2070-1600 BCE) and references to them are found in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* as early as fifth century BCE. The various combat techniques include strikes, kicks, throws, joint manipulation, and pressure point attacks. According to historical records, one among those renowned for their exceptional martial arts skills was an Indian monk named Buddhahadra, who first taught Buddhism at the famous Chinese Shaolin temple (built on the Song Mountain in Henan province in 495 BCE). Buddhahadra's first Chinese disciples were Huiguang and Sengchou.<sup>4</sup>

Another important aspect of Chinese culture is food, as Endymion Wilkinson points out in his book, *Chinese History: A New Manual*, food is often the center of social interactions, and each region has its specialties and particular

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<sup>3</sup> "Chinese History Guide."

<sup>4</sup> "Chinese History Guide."

cooking schools or styles: Lu, Yang, Yue, and Chuan. The styles of food preparation changed gradually over the centuries as new food sources and cooking methods were introduced, discovered, or created in each dynasty. Now, as then, a typical Chinese meal consists of rice and vegetable or meat dishes. One of the significant inventions for eating was chopsticks. They have been widely used since the Han Dynasty (206-220 BCE). The first item of cookware, the wok, may also have been invented during the Han Dynasty as a way of drying grains, and then in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) for preparing a broad variety of foods to eat.<sup>5</sup> That variety increased through the importation and adoption of new plants, such as tobacco, peanuts, and corn from the other parts of the world via the so-called Silk Road.<sup>6</sup>

Visual arts dating back to the Han Dynasty (206-220 BCE), capture much of the history of China. Buddhism and Daoism often influenced the best work in painting/calligraphy and sculpture. Scholars and official painters practiced ink wash painting mainly on landscapes, and flowers. Landscape paintings are heavily influenced by Daoism, with nature emphasized and people deemphasized.<sup>7</sup>

Chinese architecture is another distinct and enduring aspect of culture which took shape in East Asia over many centuries. Wilkinson observes that the structural principles of Chinese design have remained fairly consistent over the centuries, with only slight variations in the ornamental detail. Chinese architecture

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<sup>5</sup> Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 646–647.

<sup>6</sup> Wilkinson, *Chinese History: New Manual*, 646-647.

<sup>7</sup> “Chinese History Guide.”



has also had a major influence on the architectural styles of Korea, Vietnam, and Japan since the Tang Dynasty (618 CE). Chinese Daoist *Feng Shui* has contributed significantly to the concept and organization of construction and design, from commoners' residences, to imperial and religious structures.<sup>8</sup>

Chinese music is another important aspect of the broader culture, and has long included many genres. Archaeologists' discovery of ancient Chinese instruments also provides evidence of China's extensive musical tradition. Since the early days of China, music has been a central aspect of the lives of Chinese, as has its use in religious rituals. Almost every emperor and empress took musical production seriously, so much so that they often sent imperial officers to villages to collect and record folk songs. Therefore many ancient Chinese classic works of literature contained many folk songs.<sup>9</sup>

Wilkinson describes that in ancient China the culture of music referred to both dance and songs. Some dances, such as those done wearing long sleeves or carrying fans, have been recorded at least as early as the Zhou dynasty (1045–256 BCE). *Yayue*, a type of elegant music, was culturally significant in the old Chinese ritual and ceremonial performance dances. It continued to be presented in the imperial court until the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). The ancient Chinese texts record that a wealth of dances, including folk dances, were performed in traditional and court theaters. They describe trained dancers performing for the

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<sup>8</sup> Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 646–647.

<sup>9</sup> Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 648–50.

seasonal sacrifices throughout the history of Imperial China.<sup>10</sup> Contemporary takes on these Chinese dances, such as Shun Yuen performances, are happening in other Chinese communities in Asia, North America, and Europe.

### ***The Native Religions of the Chinese People***

Religion and culture were interwoven in the imperial Chinese culture. Military and civil officials also took on priestly roles. The leader of the country performed worship of Heaven at least twice a year (spring and autumn). Sacrifices were offered first to the Heaven God. Besides the spring and autumn worship, there were seasonal sacrifices at the appropriate altars. The goal of the religious rituals was to show gratitude and to ask for blessings from Heaven. But not all ancient Chinese religious traditions were focused on offering sacrifices. Daoism, for example, has long focused on allowing individuals to be in harmony with others, nature, and the guiding force of the universe.

Daoism (the “Way”) is an important ancient Chinese religion/philosophy founded by Lao Tzu around the third or fourth century B.C.E. The writings of Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching* focus on “Dao” as a way or path. Philosophical Daoism focuses on themes found in the *Tao Te Ching* and *Zhuangzi* like detachment, receptiveness, spontaneity, the “relativism of human values,”<sup>11</sup> and the search for

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<sup>10</sup> Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 646-47.

<sup>11</sup> “Taoism Sects and School,” Religious Facts, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://www.religionfacts.com/taoism/branches>.

a long life.<sup>12</sup> Tai Chi and Qigong, two signature Chinese exercises, have been heavily influenced by Daoism.

Many Chinese festivals originated with Daoism, such as the celebration of each lunar month as a ritual with a particular ancestral hero (Xien) and Lao. Other celebrations include Tomb Sweeping Day, which is celebrated every 15th day after the Spring Equinox, and the Dragon Boat Festival, which is celebrated on the 5th day of the 5th lunar month with dragon boat competitions (in Daoism, dragons symbolize feminine and masculine energy). The mid-Autumn Festival, a harvest celebration, is held on the 15th day of the 8th lunar month.<sup>13</sup> Although Daoism is deeply rooted enough to remain popular in present-day Chinese communities, many no longer know that it is also the origin of these festive days.

Another ancient Chinese religion is Buddhism. It originated in India around 563 BCE. In his book, *The World's Religion*, Huston Smith shares an interesting insight into the origin of Buddhism. According to Huston, Buddha's aim was to bring a new way of life over and against the corruption, degeneration, and worn-out rituals of his day.<sup>14</sup> Various schools of Buddhism have existed from ancient times up to the present. It is practiced by an estimated 500 million people today.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Taoism Sects and School."

<sup>13</sup> "Holidays and Festivals," More About Daoism, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://moreaboutdaoism.weebly.com/holidays-and-festivals.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Huston Smith. *The World's Religions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 94.

<sup>15</sup> Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, "The World's Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography (PDF)," accessed February 13, 2016, [http://media.wiley.com/product\\_data/excerpt/47/04706745/0470674547-196.pdf](http://media.wiley.com/product_data/excerpt/47/04706745/0470674547-196.pdf).

Buddhism is technically foreign to China, having been introduced there by Indian Buddhist monks during Han Dynasty, circa second century BCE.

However, it should be noted that the Tang Dynasty emperors' promotion of Buddhism (618-906) caused it to be assimilated into mainstream imperial Chinese culture. Paradoxically, one of the key forces driving Buddhism's success was Daoism. It was integrated in part by borrowing words and phrases from Daoism, and both religions benefited from this interchange.

Jeff Foy notes that, "Over time Buddhism became a popular force in the lives of the Chinese, from the common people to the emperor himself. In fact, by the sixth century, Buddhism rivaled Daoism in popularity and political influence."<sup>16</sup> Foy further states that, "it was during this time, and over the course of the next three centuries, that major schools of Chinese Buddhism formed. Two schools that retain their influence today are Pure Land Buddhism and Chan (Zen) Buddhism." Even in mainland China, where religion is often suppressed by the government, there are practitioners of these two schools of Chinese Buddhism."<sup>17</sup> Chinese native religions coexisted mostly peacefully throughout centuries.

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<sup>16</sup> Johnson and Grim, "The World's Religions in Figures."

<sup>17</sup> Geoff Foy, "Buddhism in China," Asia Society, accessed July 12, 2017, <http://asiasociety.org/buddhism-china>.

## *The History and Context of Chinese Americans*

### *Historical Overview*

In his book, *Chinese American*, Jonathan Lee suggests that the Chinese government was at its weakest around 1800. This was partly because a significant population increase created an economic problem for China, and partly because treaties from the British Opium Wars (1839–1842 and 1856–1860) drained the Chinese economy. Chinese seaports were forced open to the West, and Western goods flooded the Chinese market. Consequently, the unemployment rate and taxes were high. The greatest outflow of Chinese immigrants occurred between the 1840s and 1900s. The first wave of Chinese immigrated to the US in search of a better life. To them, “America” means “beautiful country.” Many came because of the California Gold Rush (1848-1855), but ended up working in coal mines, railroad building, and other types of hard labor; they settled predominantly along the west coast, from Baja to Canada. Currently, there about 36 million Chinese live outside of China, of whom 3.8 million live in the US. Unsurprisingly, because of this long and diverse history of immigration, contemporary Chinese Americans are complex and diverse ethnically, economically, and culturally.<sup>18</sup>

Living in the US was difficult for the early immigrants, not least after the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed by Congress in 1882, preventing immigration and naturalization by race. Because of the immigration act, the popular conceptions and construction of the Chinese as “Orientals,” and “perpetual

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<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Lee, *Chinese American* (CA: ABC-CLIO 2016), 2-3.

foreigners” arose. They were forced to live in “Chinatowns,” and American-born Chinese children were compelled to attend segregated schools.<sup>19</sup> Some positive social changes for Chinese immigrants occurred during the postwar period—a legacy of the US-Chinese alliance during World War II.

Among the Chinese immigrants, Taiwanese immigration largely originated with exchange students sent to the US. The 1965 Immigration Reform Act increased the number of Chinese immigrants coming to America from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan to approximately 20,000 per year. A clause giving immigration priority to applicants with exceptional skills increased the proportion of Taiwanese professionals within this pool. Furthermore, the Immigration Act of 1990 allowed wealthy Taiwanese (and Chinese) immigrants to move between countries.<sup>20</sup> Out of this reality arose the term “Astronaut Dads,” which was invented to describe Chinese immigrant families split between continents, with wives and children living in North America, and fathers traveling back and forth between countries for work. Similarly, from the 1900s onward, Taiwanese parents sent their children to the US to study; this subsequently spawned the term, “parachute children.” These families have established family structures based on the future of the next generation(s). Marital satisfaction is often sacrificed for the opportunity to have overseas education and career choices for children. Moreover, these parents’ focus on providing financial (as opposed to emotional) support to their children has in general led to negative and stressful family relationships.

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<sup>19</sup> Lee, *Chinese American*, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Lee, *Chinese American*, 119.

### *Chinese American Christians*

Evangelical Protestant Christianity is the most practiced Christian faith among the middle-class Chinese immigrants in North America, and Chinese churches often play a major role in immigrant families' lives. Lee describes two basic kinds of Chinese American Christians. The first wave of immigration came between the 1840s to the 1950s, and brought with it a population that was rather homogeneous and mostly Cantonese-speaking. They arrived with their native religious beliefs, and only became Christians upon settling in the US. The second wave (after 1950s) of Chinese immigrants converted to Christianity prior to their arrival in North America. The number of Chinese American churches began to increase during the 1950s with the arrival of this second wave. Chinese American students likewise began to hold Bible studies on college campuses, and many of these groups later became churches. Some of them even gained financial independence and became non-denominational.<sup>21</sup>

Chinese churches in North America today tend to be quite conservative, and rely heavily on Western constructs and theologies. They continue to uphold the nineteenth century missionaries' worldview and hope to pass it on to their next generations. At the same time, Chinese immigrants expect their church and their leaders to preserve the "Chinese" culture for their families. Chinese New Year and Mid-Autumn celebrations are thus commonly held by local Chinese churches. Often sermons are in Chinese, and are translated to English for

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<sup>21</sup> Lee, *Chinese American*, 241-246.

members who do not speak Chinese. Slowly but surely, many Chinese churches are offering an English-only service for the younger generation

### ***Background of Chinese Immigrant Christian Women's Struggles***

The version of Christianity was introduced to the Chinese people by the Europeans bore the ideologies such as political centrism, monolithism, and superiority, in addition to its theology. Unfortunately, many variants of Christian belief were established under the auspices of colonial constructs. These include the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) movement, which originated in the United States during the 1830s, and was influenced by contemporary ideas about “Manifest Destiny” and America’s place as the world’s new Israel.. When Adventist missionaries established themselves in Asia around the 1880s, they brought with them a “colonizing” attitude and a commitment to Western dominance. Thus, even though the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church was and is to finish the “work” of saving souls—to evangelize, convert, and enculturate their members so that they can live life with wholeness and look forward to the second coming of Jesus Christ—they relied heavily on fears of eternal destruction to draw Asians to the faith. In fact, except for Japan, they were quite successful in increasing their membership numbers throughout Asia.

It is undeniably true that a few fortunate Asian countries and cities, especially the coastal regions, benefited from “establishment” Christianity and the development of colonization: both phenomena brought and created infrastructural,



political, educational, medical, and economic influences to Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, among others.

Colonialization, including the expansion of Christianity in Asia, drove migration to the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. It was the dream of many Asians, then and now, to live in the Western world. And because Christian churches have historically supported their members' studies abroad, many Asian Christians have had the opportunity to enroll in Western universities.

Before the recent migration trend started, one of the main reasons why Chinese people left China was the start of its Communist Revolution in 1945. This led to the collapse of the Republic of China and the defeat of its leader, Chiang Kai-shek. He escaped to Formosa, now called The Republic of China (Taiwan), and established a regime separate from mainland China. Many others fled to Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Hong Kong (then under British rule) before the People's Republic of China (PRC) stopped accepting immigration requests between the 1940s and 1980s.

The number of immigrants from Hong Kong and China increased again after the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. In fear of having to return to China in 1997 with the end of the New Territories lease when the British transferred the former British colony to China, many Hong Kong Chinese were frantically seeking to flee Hong Kong despite their established careers and comfortable living. As a result, many left for Canada, Australia, and the United States. The Immigration Act of 1990, signed into law by President George H. W. Bush,

brought another wave of Chinese immigration to the United States. Many of those immigrants were students and professionals.

As these immigrants settled in the US, they faced major cultural shifts. Most Chinese women—and perhaps Asian women in general—will agree that there are certain expectations unique to Asians, specifically related to the demand that they perform certain obligations to avoid guilt and shame. When asked, many cannot even pinpoint where those expectations come from. Christian women have additional layers of challenge. In addition, on the one hand, they look forward to the Western culture but on the other hand, feeling uneasy about the Euro American culture. Asian women at large suffered being marginalized from sexism, and yet they do not feel comfortable being a totally “Westernized” woman.

In Kwok Pui-lan’s book, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, she critiques some of the concepts from the Christian Bible and Confucianism, and describes their lasting adverse effects on East Asian women. Indian women experienced similar oppression under the cultural and religious influence of Hinduism. In the book *More Than Serving Tea*, Nikki Toyama points out that misogyny runs deep in Asia, as boys are the preferred gender in many Asian countries; consequently, it is common for parents to abandon baby girls in the Chinese countryside. In Japan, women students and workers are openly discriminated against. Sex industries are rampant in Asian cities, especially in China, Taiwan, and Thailand. Asian women usually suffer in silence. They seem polite and quiet but that does not mean they do not have pain and needs.

### *Chinese American Literature*

Chinese churches focus on the culture back home. Second generations are not exposed to Chinese American literature. According to Lee, “Chinese American literature is poetry, fiction, nonfiction, drama, and other writings written by those of Chinese descent living in the United States.”<sup>22</sup> Most early Chinese American writings were protests of social conditions within the Chinese American communities. Lee writes, for example, that “the two-volume *Songs from Gold Mountain* and the poems written by Chinese detainees at the Angel Island immigration center depict a collective experience of the hardship of Chinese American life.”<sup>23</sup> Second-generation Chinese immigrant Adventist therefore do not possess a historical background of their parents’ migration and also do not know why they are not allowed to fully immerse in mainstream US culture.

In the secular Chinese community, Chinese American writers have focused their writing on memoirs of China and autobiographies. Their aim was to counter adverse images of the Chinese. One such book, Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* depicts relationships between Chinese American mothers and daughters. Its embrace of greater thematic diversity marked a departure in Chinese American writing. Other writers, such as Eric Liu and Jean Kwok, began to consider the issues of cross-cultural identity. Lee predicts that Chinese American literature will continue “to resonate and reflect the multiple dimensions and expressions of self,

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<sup>22</sup> Lee, *Chinese American*, 346-352.

<sup>23</sup> Lee, *Chinese American*, 348.

community, and history.”<sup>24</sup> Chinese Adventists are lacking these supportive literatures.

### **Discussion of the Problem**

Taken as a whole, Chinese American immigrant Adventist families experience challenges in at least five main areas: cultural tension, gender issues, economic status, diaspora, and spirituality.

#### ***Cultural Tension***

Immigrant parents mainly focus on meeting their children’s physical and financial needs. Meanwhile, they are adjusting themselves to Euro American ways as best as they can, while also striving to preserve their native culture. When they immigrate to this country, most are not well-to-do, but they work hard to contribute to society and adapt to the new environment; generally, are successful at doing so. However, the ability to meet their children’s emotional and spiritual needs is a much more difficult issue, one that is often overlooked by those both inside and outside of the Chinese community. Living in a liminal space, neither the parents nor the children feel as if they fully belong to the Euro-American culture which surrounds them. Although they have lived in the US for a while, they do not consider themselves at home there—and yet they do not feel like locals when they return to visit their former home country, either.

When their immigrant children are exposed to the mainstream culture through school and friends, the parents often do not validate their children’s

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<sup>24</sup> Lee, *Chinese American*, 352.

desire for assimilation: their fear of losing their “home” culture is overwhelming, even though most of them moved to the US voluntarily. Many parents made sacrifices to enroll their children in private Adventist education, and often create opportunities for them to make friends only with other Asians. As professionals, they seek a brighter future for themselves and the next generations—and yet they are wary of, or even refuse, to let their children adapt naturally. Therefore, the emotional disconnection between children and their parents becomes progressively wider. Many children, even in their fifties and sixties, keep quiet in order to keep the peace and thus their voices are continuously muffled. Successful in their careers but lacking their own identities, they live life quite disconnected from themselves and others.

### *Gender Issues*

In spite of all their important steps forward, oppression continues to be a part of Asian women’s life journeys. Their struggles include inequality to males of all ages, a lack of decision-making power, the pressure of having to be married by their late twenties, the obligation to give birth to sons, and the requirement that they tolerate verbal abuse and sexual violence, etc. Many Asian women embrace being categorized as “helpers,” and by extension embrace being second class to—and even sexual objects for—men. Confucian and neo-Confucian teaching on filial piety and gender roles are reinforced by Christianity’s patriarchal influences, and the daughters of Chinese immigrants are further marginalized because also they are taught to be submissive.

Many older Asian American Adventist pastors continue to preach complementarianism and praise their female members for being excellent servers in the church kitchens. Many parents pressure their daughters to marry men in medical professions, and forbid them to date non-Asians. As young women begin to voice their opinions and desires, they experience shame, guilt, and hurt. In general, most Asian children are expected to obey their elders in all aspects of life. Many Chinese women prefer to marry non-Asians to escape these cultural pressures and emotional conflicts, as they know marrying a Chinese or other Asian will very likely perpetuate these habits.

### *Economic Status*

Many Americans have an inaccurate perception that all Asians are high achievers, especially East Asians (Chinese, Japanese and Koreans) and South Asians (mainly Indians). This “model minority” stereotype inadvertently creates pressure for the descendants of Chinese immigrants to strive for academic and professional success at all costs.

It is estimated about at least half of Chinese immigrant population is in the middle-class range.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, children in middle-class immigrant families have less voice and autonomy than children of other classes. This is because middle-class parents put all their hopes and dreams into their children, partly out of a desire to provide the best for them, and partly to fulfill their own dreams vicariously. They also feel as if they are “losing face” if their peers’ children do

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<sup>25</sup> Jie Zong, “Chinese Immigrants in the United States,” Migration Policy Institute, last modified September 29, 2017, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/chinese-immigrants-united-states>.

better than their own. Many young people feel pressured into very particular careers—as doctors, dentists, lawyers, and pharmacists. This is especially prevalent in Adventist circles. Asian-American Adventists are highly competitive and consequently friendships of the next generations are often affected by their parents.

### *Diaspora*

Sadly, after the Communist party took over China, many Chinese were no longer proud to be called Chinese, and many of them fled from the Mainland. Some even become offended when referred to as Chinese. Therefore, names like Taiwanese, Singaporeans, Hua Chau (for Singaporean Chinese, Malaysian Chinese, Vietnamese Chinese, Indonesian Chinese), and Hong Kongers are used as alternative identifiers. During social introductions, it is important for many Chinese descendants to specify where they live(d). Many times, they will hide their annoyance with silence if addressed as Chinese, and/or if it is assumed that all Chinese people come from the nation-state of China. Deep down, it is not without regret, they distinguish themselves from Mainland Chinese individuals because of their political and cultural differences.

Hong Kongers grieve the fact that they can no longer return home, and feel forced but grateful to be in a foreign land such as the Taiwanese immigrants, in general, leave Taiwan completely for a better future, whereas Mainland Chinese parents often work in the US but leave their children behind with family. In these and other ways, Chinese and Chinese Americans as a whole are

fragmented, and their unvoiced pain and grief are often unidentified and unattended to.

Asians are group-oriented in nature, and therefore they feel isolated when they are not in a community. Chinese immigrants, especially the younger population, often feel out of place at home, and like misfits at school and work. They are no longer seen as “pure” Chinese, and yet they are not recognized by society as “full” Americans. Even when they meet other Chinese people, they still may not feel at home unless they are both from the same region.

### *Spirituality*

While many Adventist Chinese immigrant parents feel that it is their duty to maintain the “Chinese” culture for their children, this sense of responsibility bleeds over to religious beliefs and practices too. Many young second generation Adventists feel restricted by the rules and doctrines of the church, and they are discouraged from exploring spirituality on their own. Some also disconnect from their parents, their community of faith, and the God and/or religion they inherited from their parents.

In 2015, the Adventist world church voted to not let each division decide whether to ordain women to ministry. Since then, the president has been heavily reinforcing the decision. Many members—especially many young members—are very disappointed and even angry with the church for this decision, and a large number are disengaging from Adventism because of it.



## **Discussion of the Thesis**

Pragmatic spiritual practices can nourish and bring wholeness to Chinese American women by giving them voices, and fostering creativity, healing, and flourishing. This dissertation focuses on: 1) healing the pain of first- and second-generation Chinese American adolescent and adult Adventist women. The pain from struggling to transition culturally, socially, and spiritually, as some feel they are forced to choose between their family and their new-found identity in God and in the Euro American culture, 2) providing additional and helpful spiritual practices to Chinese Adventist women for daily religious living, 3) giving them a voice through me, for the purposes of empowering them to continue living in this liminal space, and giving them the courage to be free to be who they are inspired to be.

## ***Definition of Terms***

Euro American culture – Mainstream American culture.

Transition – Seeking and developing identities from the home culture with the influence of Euro American culture.

Struggles – The difficulties in navigating through “old” and “new” cultures.

Liminal space – The space between two or more influences or situations.

Spiritual practices – These include the Compassion Practice, Internal Family System, reflection, healing of the past wounds, discernment, variation of prayers, laughter, humor, connections, and Sabbath rest.

Christianity – This paper focuses on Adventism.

Healing – Facing one’s wounds, letting go of hurt and resentment, allowing divine power to take over and transform or heal one’s life.

Compassion – Overcoming barriers to reach in and reach out with love, empathy, and care.

Giving voice – Providing opportunities for a person to express his or her lived experience.

Flourishing –The result of being liberated and motivated to be who one is inspired to be.

Wholeness – The status of a spiritual nature with a soul harmonious, connected and joyful within a physical body.

### ***Audience***

My dissertation committee members comprise my primary audience.

Religious leaders, teachers, parents, men, and women who come into meaningful contacts with Chinese Americans within the Seventh-day Adventist community are also a part of my targeted audience. Also, I hope for this paper to spur conversations with the Chinese and perhaps the East Asian communities in North America.

### ***Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations***

In my dissertation, I focus on middle-class Chinese American women who have experienced first- or second-hand immigration to the US. Even though I have narrowed my focus to the Chinese people, the cultural tendencies I discuss

are broad, and there are various exceptions, including the in-between circumstances of interracial and interreligious marriages, the variance in economic status, and the complications and oppression experienced by LGBTQI+ Chinese Americans.

I understand that not all female Chinese American immigrants and their daughters have the same needs and face the same challenges. Yet after hearing story after story from Chinese American collegiate women, I have had to conclude first, that they need healing, and second, that first- and second-generation immigrants have vastly different causes of pain and ways of healing.

In attempting to avoid overgeneralizing Asian Americans, I fear I may have focused too narrowly on my target population. Nonetheless, my goal is to be part of a community which helps liberate and heal Asian American women to live in wholeness, their distinct voices heard and their pains cared for. I am committed to empowering Chinese Americans, especially the younger generation, to flourish and enjoy life to the fullest.

I hope that this study will bring renewal, healing, and liberation to Chinese American women in the Seventh-day Adventist community. As their lived experiences shift with time, I hope the fluid and decentralized methodology I use in this paper will serve as one of the models for future research and reexamination. I am fully aware that not all Chinese American women in the Adventist community face the challenges I describe. This dissertation, however, can be a resource to those who need and desire liberation and healing. Also, I

hope this work can be helpful to other Asian American communities influenced by Confucianism.

The aim of my writing is not to advocate for Chinese American women to be like men (for to me that is not equality), but for society to recognize their struggles and needs, and for them to realize they possess power just by being Chinese American women. I believe that healing and empowerment can come from spiritual practices originating in both the East and the West. For these reasons, I situate this paper within the purviews of Asian theologies and feminist theological studies, and attempt to bring awareness of fluidity and the dangers of boundary setting (“us” versus “them”) into the practice of Asian American feminist theology.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

This dissertation is a quest for pragmatic wisdom using the frameworks of practical theology, Euro American feminist theology, Asian American feminist theology, post-colonial feminism, the teachings of Jesus, and Chinese philosophy (e.g. “the Middle-Way”) as methodological guides.

Using those theories as critical lenses, it explores the sources of the emotional and spiritual needs, struggles, and challenges of middle-class Chinese American women as they experience liminal living in the US. Using the same method, it examines the spiritual beliefs and practices of Seventh-day Adventism, and explores additional opportunities for Adventists to pursue healing, religious living, and nurturing.

Through its literature review, it names the struggles of these women as they face challenges under the traditions influenced by Confucianism and other misogynistic constructs. This inquiry works to draw from various literature and studies to give a theological response to the lived experiences of Chinese Adventist immigrant women, as well as to locate and create spiritual practices. These may be used as resources to support Chinese American Adventist women’s healing and daily spiritual living.

## **Researcher's Summary**

### ***Practical Theology***

The construct of this dissertation stems from the wisdom of practical theology and spirituality. Practical Christian theologians integrate interdisciplinary studies into their writings, as well as research shaped by lived experiences, scripture, theology, and Christian history. Taken together, these provide rich material for theological reflection and action. In addition to these sources, practical theology draws upon psychology, the social sciences, literature, and the sciences. Although it is a relatively young academic discipline, it is an all-encompassing approach to theological reflection and the reexamination of religious faith. It is attractive to many theologians and scholars because it is easily interwoven with other areas of scholarly interests, including biblical and historical studies, and doctrinal theology.

Moreover, practical theology is a unique discipline which draws on the daily experiences of individuals and communities, learns from people's interpretation of social and ethical expertise, and brings meaning and reflection to our faith and religious practices. To do practical theology is to bring one's religious experiences alive, to make them relevant within oneself, and to share them with others. Therefore, it can be an essential discipline for spiritual practice and growth. Practical theological reflections comprise a vital force for witnessing, interpreting, and analyzing lived human experiences, and giving voices to those who need them through theological reconsideration and action.

Bonnie Miller-McLemore points out that practical theology “has always included guidance for faithful living with attention to salvation.”<sup>26</sup> In this way, she provides a goal, an intent, and meaning in doing theology from people’s experiences. And according to John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, those who do research in practical theology study lived experiences.<sup>27</sup>

As they describe practical theology as being situated within a “complex web of relationships,”<sup>28</sup> Swinton and Mowat claim that there are at least four different ways to refer to practical theology:

1. As an activity of believers seeking to sustain a life of reflective faith in the everyday living.
2. As a curricular area in theological education, focused on ministerial practice.
3. As an approach to theology used by religious leaders, as well as by teachers and students across the curriculum.
4. As an academic discipline pursued by a smaller subset of scholars to sustain these first three enterprises.<sup>29</sup>

In a similar vein, Swinton and Mowat note that there are many diverse approaches to practical theological reflection because it “embraces research that is empirical, political, ethical, psychological, sociological, pastoral, gender-oriented

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<sup>26</sup> Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 104.

<sup>27</sup> John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 1742.

and narrative-based,”<sup>30</sup> and it associates “with action-oriented religious works, such as formation, transformation, discipleship, fitness, ministry, public mission.”<sup>31</sup>

Another practical theological scholar, Richard Osmer, identifies the four key questions and tasks as being:

1. What is going on? (The descriptive-empirical task.)
2. Why is this going on? (The interpretative task.)
3. What ought to be going on? (The normative task.)
4. How might we respond? (The pragmatic task.)<sup>32</sup>

Osmer names these tasks as the Four Task of Practical Theological Interpretation<sup>33</sup>. It offers a pragmatic approach to issues by first gathering information, followed by studying into the issues, reflecting from different angles, giving interpretation, and finally, rendering responses and offering good practices. He desires to build a basic structure, through these tasks, in bridging the academy and ministry. This common structure can help “congregational leaders in recognizing the interconnectedness of academy and ministry.”<sup>34</sup>

The framework of this dissertation follows Osmer’s Four Tasks of Practical Theological Interpretation as I reflect deeply on, and interpret the meaning of the lived experiences of the first- and second-generations of Chinese

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<sup>30</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 1741.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Willaim B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 4.

<sup>33</sup> Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 12.



Adventist immigrant women. It is my hope to offer a theological response, encourage discipleship in myself and those around me, and give voice and meaning their struggle. Furthermore, I hope to invoke a motivation to heal, act, and grow.

### *Christian Feminist Theological Studies*

In the field of Christian feminist theological studies, European and North American theologians have led the way since the 1960s. Of these, US feminism has developed into two major types: anti-discrimination and women's liberation. North American feminist theologians like Mary Daly and Rosemary Radford Ruether, among others, have contributed to the field by proposing a variety of lenses and options which expand the imagination and possibilities regarding gender and God-human relations. In her book, *Sexism and God-Talk*, Ruether points out that "systems of authority dictate what can be experienced as well as the interpretation of that which is experienced."<sup>35</sup> According to Rosemarie Tong, US feminism encompasses various schools of thought, including liberal, socialist, radical, cultural, psychoanalytic, multi-cultural, global, and post-modernist feminism.<sup>36</sup>

Feminist theological study is both a goal and a process. Some of the goals and desires that I have observed developing in North American feminist theology

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<sup>35</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 12.

<sup>36</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theory," (lecture, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, September 28, 2015).

include increasing the recognition of women's roles as spiritual leaders, deconstructing traditional male images and descriptions of God, advocating for women in the workplace, ensuring autonomy in motherhood, and studying images of women in other matriarchal religions.

There is a delusion in the West that Christian theology reflects the universal human experience when, in fact, it is quite often focused only on the male experience. As Ruether describes, "The uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of women's experience."<sup>37</sup> Feminist theology, in general, opens a space for women to claim their voices, express themselves through creativity, and make spirituality relevant. It is often mistaken as an exclusive study when, in actuality, the intent driving feminist voice-claiming is a cry for inclusion in theological study. North American feminist theological reflections have expanded my circle of religious education and a space that goes beyond the opposition of political action. This dissertation hopes to reflect the imagination and creativity in advocating for an inclusive and balanced future for humanity.

### *Asian Feminist Theological Studies*

Asian feminist theological studies form a crucial platform for my theological response to the lived experience of Chinese Adventist women in this dissertation. In the 1980s, Asian feminist theological scholars wrote about their shared struggles with poverty and marginalization. Their theological reflections focused more on descriptive narratives of being Asian, female, and Christian.

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<sup>37</sup> Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 13.

About a decade later, Asian feminist theologians began re-examining Christology through their experience and traditions. They included diverse stories about their heritage, stories which colonialism and traditional versions of Christianity had previously disregarded and/or discredited. In turn, they validated and stood courageously within Asia's multicultural and multi-religious context.

For the past two decades, there has been a transition as Asian feminist theologians relocated themselves as Asian American feminist theologians. Diverse studies in Christology also began to be published in the 2000s. For example, Anne Wonhee Joh's *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology*. Asian American feminist theologians continued to develop, both individually and collectively, bringing essential agendas such as social transformation and interreligious engagements to Asian communities worldwide.

This dissertation engages Confucianism and Adventism through the framework of Asian American feminist theology among inter- and/or multi-disciplinary studies, hoping to form theological responses to the oppression and marginalization of Chinese immigrant women in colonial and neo-colonial contexts. As Asian feminist theology employs methodologies like social and cultural studies to understand issues, I also use these methodologies to describe the struggles of the first- and second-generation Adventist Chinese immigrant women in a complex construct.

### *Postcolonial Theories*

Postcolonial theories were introduced to Asian American feminist theological studies in the 2000s through the work of reexamining third-world studies. These theories, partly, challenge the traditional biblical interpretation of women from the Colonial West. They seek to analyze the relationship between the symbolization of women, and the positioning of the texts in relation to class and power.

In the last decade or so, some feminist postcolonial theologians have begun to shift away from harsh critiques of the West. I agree that postcolonial theology no longer should divide, exclude, and allow for the privileging of one side over the other. The “we/they stance” is a dangerous trap, because it tends to recreate toxic dynamics of exclusion and discrimination. My dissertation aims to understand and take a middle ground as I construct a theory of using spiritual practices as healing agents. My main goal is not to prescribe a theological reflection, but instead to make tools for spiritual growth and healing available to Chinese women.

### *Jesus, the “Way,” and the “Middle-Way”*

The ancient Chinese philosophical and religious tradition refers to the sacred as the “Way” (Dao). It describes seemingly opposing forces that may be interconnected and/or complementary to each other. In fact, they may give rise to each other in the process of interrelating to one another. The writings of Lao

Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* focus on Dao as a way or path.<sup>38</sup> Like the creation story in the Bible, *Tao Te Ching* also refers to Dao as something which existed "before Heaven and Earth" was created.<sup>39</sup> There are three meanings of Dao: 1) the way; 2) the way of the universe; and 3) the way of human life.<sup>40</sup> Daoists follow a subtle, soft approach like intuition, balance of masculinity and femininity (Yin and Yang), and the practice of yielding.<sup>41</sup> Daoism encourages humanity to live in harmony with nature and with each other. To Daoists, their quest is to embrace life through Dao.

The ancient philosophy of Dao, and specifically of Daoism's "Middle-Way," constitutes one of my methodologies in this paper. Chinese people are familiar with this concept of the "Middle-Way" which describes seemingly opposing forces that are nevertheless interconnected and/or complementary to each other. The "Middle-Way" parallels the "in-betweenness" of Asian Americans, and their ongoing shifts and evolving cultural transitions. It also embraces the differences within and outside of the Asian American community, allowing individual differentiation in each person.

The philosophy of "Middle-Way" further diminishes the kind of postcolonial thinking that unfortunately uphold centrism and Christocentrism, just as it repeats the "us" versus "them" structures which it seeks to escape. The

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<sup>38</sup> "Taoism," Patheos, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://www.patheos.com/Library/Taoism>.

<sup>39</sup> "Taoism."

<sup>40</sup> Philip Novak, *The World's Wisdom* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 198.

<sup>41</sup> "Taoism."

framework of this dissertation builds on this ideal: each human being cannot thrive on one single construct. Humanity is interconnected in all ways. Liberation, in the Daoists' framework, should not be a battle between entities. When hearts are healed and whole, the natural desire to be kind and compassionate will reveal itself. At that point, connection, inclusiveness, liberation, and equality become natural to humanity.

As recorded in the four gospels of the New Testament, Jesus welcomes sinners and holds a non-judgmental attitude towards them. He did not see others as enemies but asks His disciples to pray for them. Before Jesus' crucifixion, He introduced His followers to God's Spirit, who eventually lives within them. Christians are to be one with God's Spirit and reap the outcome by possessing "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness."<sup>42</sup>

Daoism's "Middle-Way" and the "Way" of Jesus share some similar views. Thus, the incorporation of the philosophy of the "Middle-Way" does not violate my commitment to Adventism.

In summary, I integrate my methodology of bibliographical research with various feminist and postcolonial theological frameworks, which focus on notions of fluidity and decentralization. I further contextualize my work by using a particular Daoist concept and the teaching of Jesus to bring attention to the awareness of fluidity and the risks of boundary setting (us versus them). The spiritual and healing practices draw Jesus' compassion as the ultimate empowerment.

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<sup>42</sup> Galatian 5:22 (NIV).

### **Researcher's Location**

The researcher, Angela Li, is a commissioned minister in the Seventh-day Adventist church and an ordained clergy in the local SDA Southeastern California Conference. She is an APC Board Certified Chaplain, and is currently employed by the Loma Linda University School of Religion as a full-time instructor and the director of the MS Chaplaincy program. Before then, she worked as a healthcare chaplain for five years.

Angela was born to an Adventist family in Hong Kong and migrated with her family to the United States when she was a young adult. As an immigrant daughter, she went through many phases and aspects of liberation as she transitioned to American culture. Together with her husband, Ken, they have a sixteen-year-old son and a fourteen-year-old daughter. Ken and Angela are committed to being safe bridges for them, so that both can voice their opinions regarding all areas of life as they transition to adulthood.

Because Angela believes that the emotional and spiritual needs of Chinese American female youth and young adults are overlooked, she is committed to empowering and giving a voice to other immigrant women who share similar challenges. As a result of her experiences, Angela embraces diversity and hopes to advocate for the marginalized. She is also eager to learn how to connect with millennials and advocate for them. Her drive for advocacy and liberation is motivated by the compassion of God.

As a Chinese American feminist and postcolonial practical theologian, Angela's academic passion and interests include healthcare Chaplaincy curricula, spiritual development, Asian American feminist theology, and gender studies.



## CHAPTER THREE

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON FEMINIST THEOLOGIES

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a succinct summary of the recent directions that feminist theological reflection has taken in its analysis of women's marginalization. These trends encompass include North American, Latina, womanist theologies, and Asian/Asian American feminist theologies.

#### **North American Feminist Theological Studies**

North American feminist theologians have been leading the way within the arena of Christian feminist theological studies since the 1960s. Before then, there were not many written resources for systematic Christian theology from a feminist perspective. Feminist theories also emerged during the 1970s in North American universities and share a common goal: the liberation of women. As women struggled against oppression and for empowerment, it offered a "platform" for the political movement that actively seeks such change for women.

North American feminist theologians begin with a critique of a long standing patriarchal construct of theology. According to them, such systems were developed by males under sexist assumptions, either ignoring women or placing them in a male-centered framework. North American feminist theologians ground and contextualize their work to include women's experience. They lead, empower, and inspire others to see beyond the traditional view of doctrine, with the vision of living in a liberated world which will allow a woman to be whomever she desires to be. They advocate for changing the lenses through which

humanity sees and is seen, by dispensing with static binaries of gender, and embracing true wholeness for each woman and man.

The pioneers of North American feminist theologians such as Mary Daly, Mary E. Hunt, Rosemary Skinner Keller, and Rosemary Radford Ruether contributed to the field by proposing, among other things, a variety of lenses and options which expand the imaginative possibilities for gender performance and God-human relations. Naturally, feminist theology draws on the experiences of women as its foundation and truth. However, many biblical scholars do not view these experiences as being objective even though they acknowledge scriptures and biblical traditions as a collection of human experiences. In her book, *Sexism and God-Talk*, Ruether points out that “systems of authority dictate what can be experienced as well as the interpretation of that which is experienced.”<sup>43</sup>

Since the beginning of biblical times, a majority of women from most ethnic backgrounds have been disadvantaged by living in patriarchal and misogynistic societies. The attributes of women in Scripture are often adumbrated by male authorities’ patriarchal lenses. The roles of women, including those in leadership, are often limited by these interpretations. Many Christian women struggle within the gender restrictions they are forced to respect and, therefore, are in need of spiritual nourishment and opportunities to flourish. The traditional, male-centric worldview does not allow a voice and autonomy for all aspects of women's lives. And to many feminist theologians, this is problematic.

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<sup>43</sup> Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 12.

North America feminists seek a feminist re-interpretation of Western monotheistic traditions. They question and often reject the notion of God as male, and often they do not refer to God with a male pronoun. Thus, in *Sexism and God-Talk*, Ruether uses “God/ess” as a written symbol to combine both masculine and feminine forms of God.<sup>44</sup> Feminist spirituality further resists images of God which are perceived as authoritarian (e.g. God as Lord), and instead emphasizes “maternal” attributes such as nurturing, acceptance, and creativity.

Ruether insists that, “the uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of women’s experience.”<sup>45</sup> Feminist theology creates a space for women to claim their voices, express themselves through creativity, and make spirituality relevant. It is often mistaken as an exclusive study just for women when its actual intent is inclusivity in all theologies. This theological study is both a goal and a process

Another feminist theologian, Serena Jones, offers a very precise, systematic, and straightforward description of feminist theory as a collection of critical texts and dialogues rather than an elite academic field. According to her, feminist theory looks at and recognizes individual and collective thoughts and processes with grounding assumptions, orders, and rules which actively contribute to both the oppression and ultimate flourishing of women. It involves many levels, including language, emotions, physical expressions, institutional forms, and economic systems. And it goes beyond identifying oppressions.

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<sup>44</sup> Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 46.

<sup>45</sup> Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 13.

Jones further explains that feminist theorists believe that liberating women in turn liberates the whole world. When women's potential is suppressed, they cannot utilize their gifts fully to better humanity. Women have long been marginalized and ignored, and thus feminists have a sense of urgency about addressing the harm done to them. She talks about a "preferential option" for women in feminine theory—the decision to devote intellectual energies to analyze and reflect on women's lives.<sup>46</sup>

In Jones's book, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, she says that feminist theorists recognize an interconnectedness between looking at the fate and future of women and the fate and future of all persons. Women's oppression is tangled up with racism and poverty, for example. Because feminists think inclusively about the future, in liberating women, all who are broken can be liberated. They believe that things can get better.<sup>47</sup>

There is a misconception that Christian theology in the West reflects the universal human experience when in fact it is quite often focused rather exclusively on the male experience. Some of the goals and desires in developing North American feminist theology that I observe include increasing the recognition of women's roles as spiritual leaders, deconstructing traditional male images and descriptions of God, advocating for women in the workplace, ensuring autonomy in motherhood, and studying images of women in other matriarchal religions.

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<sup>46</sup> Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 17–18.

<sup>47</sup> Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 12–13.

## Latina Feminist Theological Studies

Latina/Chicana feminism reflects the reality of the struggle against inequality, both among women, and between men and women. In *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, Maria Pilar Aquino calls Latina/Chicana feminism a personal quest and struggle. “Its goal is the transformation of the hegemonic kyriarchal relationships of domination. It is a process because it engages in the continuing challenge of an oppositional feminist consciousness.”<sup>48</sup> Latina feminist theology stems from the understanding and directions of Latina/Chicana feminism. According to Aquino, this theology of hope and truth takes on the lived experiences of the Latina community. It is interconnected with the history, legacy, and movements to create feminine theological languages.

Latina feminist theologians in the US contribute to liberating women within traditions through their critical reflections and voices. They approach this task by providing feminist religious intellectual construction. They lift their voices to explore the variety of issues that interest, trouble, challenge, and motivate them, for they are aware of how important it is for women to hear one another's voices and stories and how that facilitates the work that needs to be done. Latina voices are expressed in diverse mythologies and approaches, and contribute to the national tapestry of women's experiences. They raise to our consciousness the missing Latina textures, colors, and shapes that are unique and precious to them. By adding those experiences, they seek to transform and enlarge

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<sup>48</sup> Maria Pilar Aquino, “US. Latina Feminist Theological Insight,” in *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice*, ed. Maria Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado, and Jeanette Rodriguez, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 137.

the canvas and create a connection to the work of feminist and womanist theologians.<sup>49</sup>

Feminist theology is a dynamic and critical language with which Latinas express their own religious version of a new paradigm of civilization, free from the systematic injustice and violence of patriarchy. The re-imagination of Latina feminist religious practices and language allows them to claim their identity and “seek to effect ...the present and future direction of society, culture, churches, and the Academy.”<sup>50</sup>

As Latina women engage in theology, whether in the church or the academy, they recognize the importance of claiming a space for their voices to be heard and for collaboration among women to be achieved. With the development of the feminist theologies of liberation, they protest to the community and validate their own experiences of life and faith. Another critical task is to examine inequalities along the lines of citizenship, property, race, class, gender, and religion as they impact individuals and the communities. Aquino insists that “liberation comes when God's children can express in their own words their experience of God and the plural ways of living their faith.”<sup>51</sup> Latina feminist theology integrates theory and practice in reflecting life. It is continually redefining itself in response to the fluidity of life.

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<sup>49</sup> Aquino, foreword to *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, x.

<sup>50</sup> Aquino, foreword to *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, xvi.

<sup>51</sup> Aquino, “US. Latina Feminist Theological Insight,” 55–57.

Many fields of practical theological study arise from our plural practices and lived experiences. Like masculine theologians, feminist theologians want to be able to tell their own stories and speak about their situations and hopes in language that fits the gender of their writers and readers. They also reexamine ideologies like nationalism and other political ways of being and organizing in the world. Latinas are connected by a shared history of colonization and domination. These have seen alien intruders on their land. Because of the Western construct, they continue to experience daily cultural, social, and racial challenges. It is this national and international reality that is unique and important to Latina feminists, and it focuses their writings on power relations.<sup>52</sup>

To this end, feminists begin their critique of injustice using their social location, which includes their gender and cultural situatedness. Shared histories and stories of colonization are being interpreted and moved in new and liberating directions for humanity. The outcome leads to a formation of a Christian version of an alternate human social order. Feminists advocate for a just society, which brings wholeness to both women and men.

These examinations of the lived experience of Latina American women compel their engagement their relationship with the God of life revealed in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, through such theological reflections, Latinas engage with other women in light of their unique social and cultural circumstances.

The quest for justice and social transformation empowers Latinas to challenge their colonized culture's devaluation of key identity markers like language. It affirms the worth of their native intellectual legacy. By extension,

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<sup>52</sup> Aquino, "US. Latina Feminist Theological Insight," 55-61.

Latina feminists are also trying to formulate a "marginal" theory because of their location, which is simultaneously outside and slightly inside of the Western frame of reference. They have found it necessary to articulate new positions, which examine the "in-betweenness" of Latinas who live in the US. Like Asian American and womanist theologians, Latinas live an in-between existence, which maneuvers across racial, cultural, social, economic, and other boundaries as a minority. Even as citizens, a non-white woman continues to navigate outside of her standing. In the academic arena, they may all be part of the Academy, but their research continues to be relegated to the sidelines and labeled a "special topic." Despite this marginalization, they continue to work out innovative intercultural feminist theological methods. "They came together driven by the desire to actualize their 'anthological imagination,'"<sup>53</sup> and they do this still.

### **Womanist Studies**

Womanist theology is by and for African and African American women. It re-examines and revises the traditions and practices of religion and biblical interpretation within a paradigm which empowers and liberates women of African descent. Many womanist theologians find their roots in Africa though they live in North America. Unlike earlier generations, many of them have received formal education in teaching, nursing, etc. in their own and/or other countries. Yet many believe that being westernized is the road to liberation in Africa. However, as African churches embrace the Western patriarchal structure, women's roles

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<sup>53</sup> Aquino, "US. Latina Feminist Theological Insight," 61.



continue to be restricted by church authorities. Women who desire to be members of the clergy are instead “equipped” as pastors’ wives because women are still seen as filling merely a supportive role.<sup>54</sup>

A pioneer in this field has been Mercy Amba Oduyoye, a well-known Womanist theologian, who grew up under a colonial culture. Though her father could not serve as a model for developing her theology and advocacy for women, her mother and paternal grandmother gave her the necessary strength and motivation to do so. She believes in women empower women. In *Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens*, Oduyoye points out that, “Christianity in Africa began by confusing Christianity and European culture.”<sup>55</sup> Like those in other ethnic groups, she sees the struggles of African women and herself being “pushed aside” by Eurocentric and patriarchal authorities. She believes that issues with ordination of the women originally came from Western churches. She explains that such barriers frustrate women. Womanist theologians like Oduyoye thus focus their work on the religio-cultural and social factors that affect Christian women and theology.<sup>56</sup>

Among other Womanist pioneers is an African American professor and theologian named Jacquelyn Grant. She is known for drawing others’ attention to the fact that lower-class black women are triply oppressed and marginalized—by

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<sup>54</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Be a Woman and Africa will be Strong,” in *Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens: Feminist Theology in Third World Perspective*, ed. Letty M. Russell, Pui-lan Kwok, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, and Katie Geneva Cannon (Louisville, KY: The Westminster Press, 1988), 39.

<sup>55</sup> Oduyoye, “Woman Africa Strong,” 39.

<sup>56</sup> Oduyoye, “Woman Africa Strong,” 47–48.

racism, sexism, and classism. In her books, *Womanist Theology* and *White Woman's Christ, Black Women's Jesus*, she describes, "Jesus as a 'divine co-sufferer' who suffered in his time like black women today."<sup>57</sup>

Another Womanist thinker, Delores Williams, expands on the theological work of "others" like Grant, and suggests that to bring wholeness, womanist theologians need to "search for the voices, actions, opinions, experience, and faith" of black women. This will, in turn, allow them to experience the God who "makes a way out of no way."<sup>58</sup> She defines Womanist theology as:

a prophetic voice concerned about the well-being of the entire African-American community, male and female, adults and children. Womanist theology attempts to help black women see, affirm, and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the African-American community. Womanist theology challenges all oppressive forces impeding black women's struggle for survival and for the development of a positive, productive quality of life conducive to women's and the family's freedom and well-being. Womanist theology opposes all oppression based on race, sex, class, sexual preference, physical ability, and caste.<sup>59</sup>

On seeing God, Kwame Bediako, an African leader and scholar, says that,

"the precise nature of African pre-Christian religious thought and experience continues to be explored by African scholars but it seems that the old religions as polytheism is virtually abandoned."<sup>60</sup> Womanist reflections are focused on practice, finding meaning, and

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<sup>57</sup> Oduyoye, "Woman Africa Strong," 43.

<sup>58</sup> Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 115.

<sup>59</sup> Williams, *Sisters Wilderness: Challenge Womanist God-talk*, 136–145.

<sup>60</sup> Daisy N. Nwachuku, "West Africa," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2014), 517.

“reasoning from experience and nature about the basic truths of God and humanity.”<sup>61</sup>

Like Latina/Chicana feminism, the literary work of black women is significant in that it enables them to reclaim their identity and explain their lived experience. Another pioneering womanist theologian, Katie Cannon, describes this lifelong experience as being “repeatedly unheard but not unvoiced, unseen but not invisible.” Womanism, in contrast, “connects our cultural values, oral traditions, and social experiences to our spirit forces in the quest for meaning amid suffering.”<sup>62</sup> In doing so, it also reacts and responds to the oppression imposed by the overriding Western narrative spoken against black women.

Womanist work, like Asian American feminist studies, is currently undergoing a third wave. The scholars in this wave are writing more on intersectionality, which is now understood much more broadly than before. Hence, “womanist scholars are engaging in ecology, ecofeminism, animal rights, speciesism, and more. Not everyone can be a womanist, but everyone can learn the methodology of womanist theology and apply it to how we see God in everything and every being around us.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Daisy N. Nwachuku, “West Africa,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, 518.

<sup>62</sup> Candace Laughinghouse, “Womenist Thoelogy Summary,” Movement, accessed September 17, 2017, <http://www.movement.org.uk/womanist-theology-summary>.

<sup>63</sup> Laughinghouse, “Womenist Theology Summary.”

## **Asian and Asian American Feminist Theological Studies**

Asian feminist theology began as a reaction to liberation theologies in different regions of the world. It is not easy for Asian women theologians to categorize their theologies in one single way because they do not share a common language, mindset, social construct, or struggle. Yet, like other feminist theologians, Asian feminist theologians are not content to be treated as second-class humans and victims. Their challenges are not limited to standing against the force of patriarchy; they also fight against the backward-looking worldview of Confucianism.

For a long time, Christianity was introduced to Asia from the perspective of missionaries. Second- or third-hand Christianity was delivered to them together with colonial conditioning. Moreover, the contexts and experiences reflected in the Christian writing done for Asians were mostly written by, and focused on, men. Asian women have consequently struggled both within and outside of their own cultures: finding their roots may not be liberating. For example, Confucianism and the caste system bind them with roles, obligations, and duties. Yet as Asian women look to Western culture and Christianity for release from those bonds, they continue to struggle under Eurocentric structures and strictures. Kwok Pui-lan notes that, “Out of this trying experience, we have to face both our cultural heritage and the Christian tradition with courage and hope, that we may find new ways to do theology which will liberate us and sustain our faith.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Pui-lan Kwok, “Mothers and Daughters, Writers and Fighters,” in *Inheriting Our Mother’s Garden*, 26.

In *Making Paper Cranes*, Mihee Kim-Kort presents a formative and significant theological framework which validates both her personal experiences and as evidence of the work of God. She demonstrates the intersections between humanity by constructing and/or reconstructing theological reflections, and does so in a substantial way. A review of her book states that, “her theology is neither a majority theology nor a minority theology—it simply is authentic theology for a Korean American Presbyterian young woman in dialogue with all of the traditions in which she happens to be rooted.”<sup>65</sup> Kim-Kort’s work can be a model of authentic, raw, and contextual theological pursuits.

As Asian American feminist theologians envision a new feminist Christianity, they are developing liturgies and symbols which honor the lived experiences of Asian American women. To this day, many of them worship and “serve” God out of a sense of duty rather of joy. They understand God as a father who is unreachable, demanding, and powerful. They are not accustomed to receiving love, but rather to giving it. And because their engagement with God can comprise a love-hate or fearful relationship, they also need a space in which to mourn their losses of disconnection, and then to heal before being able to reconnect with the divine.

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<sup>65</sup> Katie Yahns, “A Review of Making Paper Cranes: Toward an Asian American Feminist Theology by Mihee Kim-Kort,” accessed September 21, 2017, <https://youngclergywomen.org/a-review-of-making-paper-cranes-toward-an-asian-american-feminist-theology-by-mihee-kim-kort/>.

## **North American and Asian American Feminist Theologies**

Jones describes feminist theory in North America as the understanding of God's grace in daily living, as it deepens one's view of God through the validation of her identity.<sup>66</sup> It is a progress of learning about God in our "native tongue." The purpose of developing feminist theology is to give all women a voice, so that they can articulate the experiences that they have lived through. It is also to develop theologies which can be applied to their daily lives. Besides pursuing equality, I believe that the goals of feminist theology are to: 1) acknowledge the uniqueness of each person's created nature; 2) empower each person to live out that uniqueness to the fullest extent; 3) seek understanding; and 4) fulfill the calling to seek compassion, peace, and justice.

Feminist theologians share a common goal of the liberation of women as they struggle with and against oppression. North American feminist theory goes beyond the opposition of political action to imagine and create an inclusive and balanced future for humanity.

A few decades ago, most women in North America were living in a hostile environment. The practice of oppression distorts the awareness of that hostility, making it difficult for the oppressed to claim and name it. Without that awareness, one cannot begin to imagine new ways of living. North American feminist theory offers an opportunity to analyze and name oppression of women. In recent years, Serene Jones has begun to look at analytic signposts like "language, emotions, physical expressions, and institutional forms," and places "at home and in offices,

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<sup>66</sup> Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 2.

laboratories, synagogues, mosques, churches, courtrooms, and university lecture halls.”<sup>67</sup>

North American feminist theory is meant to reach beyond academia and into the everyday lives of women. For oppression is intertwined with poverty, heterosexism, abuse, racism, etc. North American feminist theologians believe that the liberation of women is the key to liberating the world. Critiquing oppression and advocating for inclusion and justice can lead to the flourishing of women, and all of humanity.

The book, *Compassionate and Free: An Asian Woman's Theology*, articulates the importance of understanding God as a compassionate being. According to the author, Marianne Katoppo, understanding the divine in this way is crucial to the liberation of women. The quality of women's lives in Asia may not seem to have improved, but contextualization of their struggles caused by colonialism, missionary paternalism, and patriarchy has begun to emerge.

North American feminist theology has expanded the circle of religious education and space for women in ministry. Elaine Graham explains that, “as women's perspectives were integrated into theory and translated into practice, they challenged prevailing patriarchal standards of selfhood.”<sup>68</sup> That challenge meant changing women's place in society, and specifically in Christianity and Christian organizations. Many theologians have challenged the validity of Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 11 about the need for women to keep silent during

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<sup>67</sup> Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Elaine Graham, “Feminist Theory,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, 196.

worship. Still, many women continue to find speaking up a struggle—not just because it is difficult to speak when one has so long been silenced, but also because women may not feel the need to justify their stories in male-dominated institutions. Therefore, they may try to express them in the same format as men while challenging the gendered categories which continue to surround them.

Similarly, feminist theologians in North America and Europe have gained momentum in affirming the reconstruction, language, and image of God. They are reexamining the power of sin, the empowerment of grace, and the creation of gender, while also celebrating diversity. They interact with Scripture and traditions through the lenses and experiences of women, and in doing so continue to liberate themselves from oppressive cultural and historical constraints.

Many North American feminist theologians feel the tension between needing a community and repelling that same community, called “church.” They believe that the church can be a harmful place, and yet if they are to be a part of it, they want and need a voice there. New energy is required to revive our male-dominated churches today. A church free from the patriarchy and misogyny that feminist theology critiques provides a safe space for women to heal and to express gratitude to God.

Asian feminist theology arises out of liberation theologies created in Latin America and other regions. After World War II, many Asian countries began to gain independence from colonial powers and outgrew the label, “the third world.” Nonetheless, many countries continue to be labeled as such due to their political and economic status. Third-world women challenge the lack of attention to gender



in third-world theologies. Among them are members of the Women's Commission within the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), established in 1983. However, third-world women theologians continue to struggle to find their voices among their male theological peers.

Female theologians from Asia have a difficult time identifying themselves with the diverse cultures in Asia and calling their studies Asian feminist theology. It is because many Asian countries do not share common language, food, cultural practices, and religious practices. Moreover, many complain that female Asian theologians are expected to write on issues about Asians or Asian Americans—the implicit (and incorrect) assumption being that they can speak for such an enormous range of human experience. This type of general categorization is unhelpful to the field of theological studies.

The quest for identity seems to be one of the major foci for Asian and Asian American theologians. Courtney Goto, a practical theologian in North America, acknowledges the confusion when writing in the field of practical theology in her earlier years. As a Japanese American, she describes the tension between writing on her desired topics and the expectations or categorization in the field of practical theology. The two-fold struggle against Eurocentric and patriarchal structures is noteworthy in Asian American feminist religious thinking.

With support from EATWOT, regional and international gatherings were held to organize networks for Asian and Pan Asian women. Identities developed, and these women's thoughts, concerns, and contributions were published

worldwide. The publications probed the diversity and multiplicity of Asian and Asian American women.<sup>69</sup> Their methodologies involved three stages of content and foci: 1) identity, 2) authority, and 3) sensitivity.

Many leaders in the Asian feminist field may agree that there are, in general, three phases within the movement. In particular, Hyun Hui Kim, a Ph.D. student in Theological and Philosophical Studies at Duke University tracked and subsequently wrote a paper on the Asian Feminist Theology movement. Kim argues that, at its beginning stages, Asian feminist theologians—most committed Christians from the third world—worked primarily to address their common struggles with poverty. Likewise, they concerned themselves less with developing theories and/or theologies in analytic essays, than on maintaining clear differences in Asian women’s perspectives and identities. More specifically, they focused on elaborating descriptive narratives about the experience of being simultaneously Asian, female, and Christian. In line with this, *Inheriting Our Mothers’ Gardens* contains personal stories and histories of the oppressive experiences of women. It is a major contribution toward the development of third-world feminist theologies.

In the second phase, Kim observes that Asian feminist theologians focused on their lived experiences, and the relationship between these experiences and their traditions. Thanks to the damaging legacy of patriarchy in both Eastern and Christian religions, they saw the urgency for change, but did not desire to dictate a concrete construct. They believed that liberation advocacy needs to be fluid. Their

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<sup>69</sup> Indian (South Asian) feminist theology developed along a different trajectory towards ecofeminism.

actions grew from their heart's desires and longings, and they felt that healing can begin only when a safe space is created.<sup>70</sup>

During this second phase, feminist theologians also began to re-examine Christianity and culture using a feminist framework, while remaining aware of the differences between males and females. What emerged was the feminine aspect in the image of God as nurturing and compassionate. While Christianity and patriarchal traditions are analyzed, the rejection of traditional Asian experiences is also evaluated. As always, Asian American feminist theologians recognize the need to develop their own theology from the context and heritage of Asian women.

In her text *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*, Hyun Kyung Chung raises awareness of the relationship between women's experiences and their social contexts. Chung brings meaning to her struggle by being fully human in this fight for freedom.<sup>71</sup> Her work articulates the contribution of liberation theology from Asian women's perspective on the gospel and describes the unique challenges of Asian women in theology. She rejects the assumption that one can draw a clear line between middle-class and third-world Asian women. She observes that Asian women living in either prosperity or poverty continue to have their voices excluded in significant texts. Colonial power has marginalized both middle-class and third-world women and men. Both are in

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<sup>70</sup> Hyun Hui Kim, "Asian Feminist Theology," Drew, accessed July 15, 2017, <https://www.drew.edu/theological/2012/03/30/asian-feminist-theology/>.

<sup>71</sup> Kyung Hyun Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 1.

need of liberation from sexism. The well-being of (all) Asians is the aim of Asian feminist theology. That being said, Chung enables middle-class women to be self-critical of their social location.<sup>72</sup>

Within this second movement, Asian feminist theologians asserted their own authority to reexamine Christology through their experience and traditions. They included diverse stories and heritages which colonialism and Christianity had disregarded and/or discredited. They identified significant symbols, images, and legends of Buddhism, Confucianism, Shamanism, and Daoism. They validated and stood with the multicultural and multi-religious peoples and context of Asia.

A transition of some Asian feminist theologians locating themselves as Asian American feminist theologians was observed about two decades ago. Out of this third movement and re-positioning have emerged diverse studies in Christology. These include *The Grace of Sophia: A Korean North American Women's Christology*, by Grace Ji-Sun Kim; *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology*, by Wonhee Anne Joh; and *Korean Women and God: Experiencing God in a Multi-religious Colonial Context*, by Hee An Choi.

Most Asian feminist theologians are also beginning to engage in diverse theories and inter- and/or multi-disciplinary studies. Asian feminist theology employs methodologies like social and psychological studies to understand issues with current circumstances to liberate Asian women in a complex, globalized world. For example, in *Casting Stones: Prostitution and Liberation in Asia and United States*, Rita Nakashima Brock examines how Asian sex industries have

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<sup>72</sup> Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 26.

been shaped not only by patriarchal Asian cultures, but also by colonial and neo-colonial influences. In conversation with other disciplines, her book addresses how the relationship between religious paradigms and patriarchal structures contributes to sexual exploitation, and other abusive or violent acts toward women. Hyun Kyung Chung views the lived experiences of Asian women as texts and foundations for the methodology of Asian feminist theology. She names it han-pu-ri, as it involves the Korean *kut* ceremony of Han “the accumulation of anger caused by harm.”<sup>73</sup>

One common cause of anger is the lack of autonomy in immigrant children. As North American feminist theologians advocate for an inclusion of non-male deity, Asian mothers can be competitive and aggressive, which may damage their children’s lives. There is no term ascribed to God which without contamination.

The term “tiger mom”<sup>74</sup> describes Asian mothers who force their children to play music instruments, get straight “A” grades in school, and consider only a few career options (such as medicine or law). Given this background, it is unsurprising that many mothers fail to adequately nurture their sons and daughters, whose memories of their mothers are in turn not entirely pleasant. Therefore, to many Chinese, seeing God as a mother runs into the same predicament as calling God the father for Western women.

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<sup>73</sup> Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 36.

<sup>74</sup> “A Memoir Of A ‘Tiger Mother’s’ Quest For Perfection,” NPR, last modified January 14, 2011, <https://www.npr.org/2011/01/14/132940238/A-Memoir-Of-A-Tiger-Mothers-Quest-For-Perfection>.

Asian American feminist theologians continue to develop, both individually and collectively. In doing so, they advance significant agendas concerning liberation, postcolonization/decolonialization, and sensitivity to the diverse needs of diasporic communities. Chung points out that actively listening to the narratives of women from Asia—especially women from third-world Asian nations—has become a significant methodological spur to religio-cultural and theological reflection.<sup>75</sup>

### **Postcolonial Christology and Asian American Feminist Theology**

In the early 2000s, postcolonial theories were introduced into the arena of Asian American feminist theological thought, mainly through the reexamination of work regarding the third-world. Postcolonial studies challenge traditionalistic biblical interpretations of women stemming from the Colonial West. They do so by analyzing the symbolic relationship between biblical women and the position of scriptural texts in relation to class and power. In *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, Gale Yee explores the harmful interpretive transformation of “wicked women” in the Hebrew Bible into “sexual metaphors,” condemned for tempting male with sinful power and authority.<sup>76</sup>

Many other Asian American feminist theologians share Yee’s concern with the impact of religion on Asia’s complicated social, racial, economic, cultural, and sexual contexts. For example, Kwok’s *Postcolonial Imagination and*

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<sup>75</sup> Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 106.

<sup>76</sup> Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Women as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 4.

*Feminist Theology* seeks to transition Asian American theology to the globalized world. Her contribution is significant for both Asian feminist theology and postcolonial studies. She examines postcolonial theories and analyzes the formation of cultural imperialism among Asian women and men. Part of Asian women's struggles are rooted in Western, imperialist, and Christian influences, which imported and celebrated ideas of exclusiveness and superiority. She suggests that the oppression of Asian women stems from an amalgamation of gender, colonialist, and Christian constructs.<sup>77</sup>

Postcolonial feminist theologians also attend to the deconstruction and reconstruction of biblical women. Postcolonial feminists now protest by examining various structures which stand in the way of liberating women within the Asian context, so that they can have a voice in the field of theological studies. They continue to listen to women's stories of oppression, examining the structures which are causing it through a critical lens, exposing and deconstructing those structures, and suggesting reconstruction through healing, imagination, and inclusivity.

While Asian feminist theologians assess the harm done by colonial ideologies to Asian women and men, they also question the well-intentioned ideology of missionaries who sought to reach the "gentiles." In *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Kwok shows that white male scholars have yet to pay sufficient attention to gender, race, and class while interpreting the biblical texts. Instead, they assume that their biblical traditions and salvation

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<sup>77</sup> Pui-lan Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 63.

claims are valid for all cultures and times. As such, their reconstructions of various theologies do not succeed in deconstructing the toxic powers of missional mindsets. In order to break apart the dominant Western patriarchal interpretation, especially among Asian and other communities, both academic and nonacademic, postcolonial feminist theologians like Kwok say that they prefer “not to be preoccupied with a textual approach, but to adopt communal and participatory modes of interpretation, through the use of songs, dramatized narrations, and interpretation through repetition.”<sup>78</sup> Therefore, “retooling” and “relearning” from experience are necessary for both deconstruction and reconstruction.

Postcolonial feminist critics increasingly pay attention to what Mary Ann Tolbert calls “the politics and poetics of location.” Tolbert describes the complexity of social background as the politics of location. She says, “Any interpretation of a text must be assessed not only on whatever its literary or historical merits may be but also on its theological and ethical impact on the integrity and dignity of God’s creation.”<sup>79</sup>

Feminist scholars have uncovered the struggles of past women, and their efforts have emphasized tracing Judaic and/or Hellenic influences on Christianity. But they have not focused as much on examining the present intersections between gender, colonialism, and the formation of Christianity. To fill this gap, liberation theologians critically question the political context created by “empire.”

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<sup>78</sup> Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 84.

<sup>79</sup> Mary Ann Tolbert, “When Resistance Becomes Repression: Mark 13:9-27 and the Politics of Location,” in *Reading from This Place*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 333.



Thanks to the efforts of liberation theologians, the history and development of biblical women have begun to play a significant role in the interpretation of the Bible. Liberation theology rebukes our acceptance of the androcentric language and construction of biblical texts. It has also altered our understanding of liberation itself: Kwok advocates for a broad definition of liberation, which encompasses not only the erasure of patriarchal domination of women, but also the deconstruction of “a system of oppression within racism, classism, colonialism, and sexism.”<sup>80</sup>

For her part, Kwok suggests that postcolonial feminist interpreters of the Bible create more dialogue between third-world feminist scholars and themselves, and that third-world feminists and Jewish feminists engage in conversation regarding the intersection of anti-Semitism and colonial discourse.

Postcolonial Christianity was brought to the third-world from the West. Jewish contexts are minimized in North America, and most Christian faiths claim the universal tradition initiated by Jesus Christ in the New Testament is a new religion. Additionally, other religious traditions with rich heritages, such as Islam, are discriminated against. Theologians like Kwok see the movement of Jesus as a reformation within Judaism, not as the original innovation of Jesus. This insight can create important dialogue between Christian and Jewish feminists in all regions. In the Jewish tradition, as in Christianity, there is often a general view of Jewish women as second-class citizens, who are excluded from religious leadership and roles.

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<sup>80</sup> Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 87.

Likewise reexamination of such discrimination is especially necessary in the Asian population. Without taking a deeper look, female Asian Christians can remain caught in the confusion between anti-Judaism and a Christianity which seems native but is actually missionary-taught. Without dialogue between Christian and Jewish women, some Asian Christian women, including those in the Seventh-day Adventist church, will continue to struggle within the Judeo-Christian construction of male-dominanted structures. The claim that Jesus liberates all continues to be a lie when the subordination of women is still the norm in many Christian communities. Judith Plaskow also critiques Judaism as a patriarchal tradition and encourages women to rename and reshape those Jewish traditions. Therefore, I see the formation of a united front of sisterhood as the future of postcolonial feminism.

Joh furthers the conversation by adding post-structural and liberation feminist theories to postcolonial theory. In *The Heart of The Cross*, she describes those relationships within Christology.<sup>81</sup> Unlike most other female Asian theologians, Joh draws on multiple politics of location to engage Asian American women's liminal lives through their multiple worlds. Borrowing Homi Bhabha's language, Joh examines her own "in-betweenness" and comes to a reconstruction of "interstitial life." According to Joh, an "interstitial life" begins with creating postcolonial Christology in a "non-dichotomous" framework of relationally and justice that is partial to neither the oppressed nor the oppressors.<sup>82</sup> Joh identifies

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<sup>81</sup> Kim, "Asian Feminist Theology."

<sup>82</sup> Anne Wonhee Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 63–4.

herself as an Asian American feminist theologian, and her location and writing co-identifies her with many other Christian Asian-American women: all of them desire to thrive by making positive transitions and adaptations – socially, culturally, and spiritually.

Similarly, Asian American feminist theologians present Asian women as the oppressed, but also—at the same time—as heroines who endure discrimination and fight for autonomy in every way. In her book, *The Poor Women*, Wong Wai Ching points out the limitations of generalizing about Asian women, oversimplifying the lived experiences of Asian women. Like Joh, Wong affirms a similar discourse within Asian feminist theology, specifically that it goes beyond the Asian/Western paradox. The “we/they” and perpetrator/victim dichotomy are no longer helpful in the construction of the complex worlds of Asian women.

Wong points out in the parable of “The Good Samaritan,” Jesus describes the radical way of neighborly love. Christians aim to manifest that love. Peacebuilding, interfaith dialogue, and other acts of love are not limited by race, age, class, lifestyle, or sexual orientation. The future of Christian feminist theological studies is to bring awareness to deconstruction and liberation, with the hope of an expanded collective draw of strengths in diversity.

In the article, “Love and Power: Antiracist Pastoral Care,” Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook states that humanity is transformed through both love and power.

Authentic healing comes from ending all marginalization in humankind.<sup>83</sup>

Differences and complexities must no longer be viewed as obstacles, but as opportunities for sharing and learning from one another. Postcolonial theologians are to realize that each culture bears strengths and weaknesses, and are interdependent of each other. Therefore, like feminist theologies, postcolonial theologians are to allow many voices with various experiences around the table.

R.S. Sugirtharajah, one of the first biblical scholars to move into postcolonialism, states in *Postcolonial Reconfiguration*, “What postcolonialism signifies is that the future is open and the past unstable and constantly changing.”<sup>84</sup> Many postcolonial theologians agree that postcolonial theology should not divide, exclude, or allow privilege for one side over the other. The “we/they stance” is a dangerous trap when recreating exclusion and discrimination. Power, no matter who possesses it, quickly breeds excessive authority and dominance. In stark contrast, Kujawa-Holbrook asserts that, “love and power centralized in God can bring reconciliation to the world, including a postcolonial world.”

### **Postcolonial Feminist Theology and Chinese American Theology**

How can postcolonial theology benefit Chinese American religious thinking? Kwok suggests for women to claim “the power to narrate, write back,

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<sup>83</sup> Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, “Love and Power: Antiracist Pastoral Care,” in *Injustice and the Care of Souls: Taking Oppression Seriously in Pastoral Care*, ed. Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook and Karen B. Montagno (MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 13.

<sup>84</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reformations* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003), 8.

contest, reconstruct meaning, and to play with language and imagination within the context of women's lived experience after the colonial power."<sup>85</sup> While there are many ways for creativity, she points out three prominent patterns of reflection and action: "signifying gender, requeering sexuality, and redoing theology."<sup>86</sup>

The postcolonial theologians also recognize that queer theorists have made significant contributions to feminist theology by destabilizing heterosexual biases among mainstream feminist theologians. This group has in turn had to reexamine paradigms of morality through multiple lenses, and to invent new paradigms. Moreover, fueled by colonial discourses, postcolonial theory calls into question Christocentrism, with the intent to foster interreligious dialogue and reconceive theologies. Often theologians think of race as a concrete construct: an object of either white or non-white. Whites tend to identify racism in color sensitivity while non-whites see racism as a structure of power. But what if one were to eliminate racial differences?

In *Heart of the Cross*, Joh does precisely this. She cautions against binary thinking, despite the need to dismantle racism. She notes, "The issue of having total power and the motion of absolute lack of power seem to fall into the trap of either/or thinking."<sup>87</sup> In other words, dominance is the real issue, not race, as racial spaces are fluid (especially for first- and second-generation immigrants). Joh also challenges the notion of a singular, fixed identity and draws attention to the more complex realities of race. Because of postcolonial feminist theory, Asian

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<sup>85</sup> Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 126.

<sup>86</sup> Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 128.

<sup>87</sup> Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 50–51.

Americans can benefit from having a more fluid outlook on identity, which will aid them as they continue to transform culturally and spiritually.

Colonial experiences in Asian Americans differ depending on their age, class, and socio-political location. Non-Mainland Chinese Americans, in general, have benefited from the colonial structures and hold fond memories of the old colonial days. For example, the colonial experiences of Hong Kong Chinese immigrants are mostly pleasant. Colonialism brought them a brighter future through education, economic growth, and modern-day comforts. This cohort of immigrants lives mostly in a middle-class world with decent-paying jobs.

Among the group, most Adventist Chinese immigrants enjoy the freedoms of America and are also glad to settle in that life even if they have to work hard. A big part of their reward is seeing their children having a positive future. They also tend to feel their new lives in the US are the result of divine providence although they are hesitant to freely embrace a new future.

Many Asian American theologians use the term “hybridity” to describe the living patterns of Asian Americans. Contrary to popular notions, hybridity continues to create tension within Asian American families as it assumes a mixture of cultures, disallowing accommodation for total acculturation. It hinders young immigrants from individuating and implies that they need to keep and perpetuate part of their “home” culture, even though—to them—home is here. Chinese American feminist theology will have to reexamine their relationship to culture as their children and grandchildren assimilate into mainstream America.

Though liberation is at the heart of Asian American feminist theology, Asians have become quite adept at mimicry. In particular, Asians have excelled at mimicking their colonizers, because they recognized the benefits which could accrue to them if they let go of their native ideologies. Mimicry is a topic of interest among postcolonial theorists. This is important because it is a double-edge sword. Many Chinese Americans are called the term “bananas” by their own ethnic groups. It is a derogatory and self-depreciating label meant to mock Chinese Americans who have become “too American.” It brings shame and guilt to persons, especially young Americans, who are more prone than their elders to deviate from what is considered “normal” for Chinese Americans. Feminist theology for Chinese Americans will therefore have to advocate on behalf of younger generations who are already more integrated into American society. It is unhelpful to assign disparaging terms to youths as they assimilate into mainstream culture. Doing so produces angst and confusion, and produces no positive benefit.

Along the same line, Joh introduces “interstitial space” as an open site in resisting the logic of binarism and the prescription of hybridity.<sup>88</sup> This space reflects the complexity of cultures, visions, historic memories, and possible creativity for the future. It helps to hold the ambivalent experience of liminal living with its constant shifts. Contrary to some scholars’ views on postcolonialism, Chinese or Asian American identities varies, just as there is more than one “American” identity. All identities are complex. Of course, the very term “America” shows exclusivity, for it makes an assumption about the dominant

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<sup>88</sup> Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 62.

identity being that of North America, and even more specifically the US, rather than, say, that of Central or South America.

The Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese use the term “jook sing” to describe young Chinese Americans in North America who do not speak Chinese. More specifically, the term connotes being uncultured, Americanized, and without roots. “Interstitial space” protests against such discrimination. It recognizes the “in-betweenness” of Asian Americans, advocates for inclusivity, and validates the ongoing shifts which are necessary parts of cultural transitions. This protest also embraces differences in class and gender, both inside and outside of the Asian American community, allowing for individualization to happen within each person. This protest further diminishes the legitimacy of using mimicry as a critique in postcolonialism, for it is discriminatory to allow and value mimicry within one’s heritage but not to value it across cultures. This kind of postcolonial thinking unfortunately parallels centrism and Christocentrism, because it is again repeating the “us” versus “them” idea.

According to Joh, one of the most direct criticisms of postcolonialism comes from Aijaz Ahmad. He argues that the methodologies of postcolonialism “derive largely from contemporary Euro American critical theories, which are politically ‘regressive’ in many ways.”<sup>89</sup> And Joh further notes that “the postmodernist deconstructionist approaches are seen as not necessarily immune to essentialist constructions of their own.”<sup>90</sup> Asian American postcolonialists must

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<sup>89</sup> Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 66–67.

<sup>90</sup> Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 66–67.



therefore be mindful of the constant deconstruction of “homelessness,” the dissatisfaction of any “arrival,” the effect on younger Asian Americans who found homes in “foreign lands,” and other similar constructions.

Joh reexamines Korean theology, but Chinese Americans also need a theological framework which will re-analyze the “we/they” mindset. Such a construction could help them dispute Eurocentric views of Christianity, provide comfort and healing from cross-cultural transitions, and liberate and give voice to men, women, and children oppressed by aspects of both Western and Eastern cultures.<sup>91</sup> Chinese American theology should support and inspire spiritual flourishing, and be relevant to cultural shifts within the community. It also should create a space in biblical interpretation for the lived experience of all Chinese Americans, so that they can thrive without the need to compare ideologies and compete against male-dominant and Western structures.

The gender of God and Jesus, and its association with women’s role and oppression at large, are the focal point of Euro American and European feminists. Rosemary Radford Reuther traces the connection back to Greek philosophy. Postcolonial feminist theologians claim that they recognize the contributions of Euro American feminist theologians, and then go beyond them in matters of race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion.

### **Diaspora, Eurocentrism, and Chinese American Feminist Theology**

As colonialization, decolonialization, reconstruction, and globalization brought forced or voluntary migration to the US and other parts of the world,

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<sup>91</sup> I believe that the oppression of women and children diminishes the wholeness of men.

diaspora has become a phenomenon. According to William Safran, a political scientist, the term “diaspora” originated from the Jewish experience which includes: 1) a collective forced dispersion of a religious or ethnic group from the “center” to two or more peripheral locations, 2) retaining a collective “memory” of the homeland, 3) not sensing full acceptance from the host land, 4) regarding their homeland as the ideal place to return to when appropriate, and 5) continuing to identify with the home culture.<sup>92</sup>

The term “diaspora” began to apply to many other locations beyond the Jewish experience in the 1960s. Currently, “diaspora” shares an even broader meaning which includes voluntary migrations of individuals, families, workers, refugees, and exiled communities. Many Asian American immigrants may not have been forced to leave their homelands, and though not longing to return may be shuttling willingly between “home” back in Asia and “home” in the United States. Kwok describes diaspora in the Asian American community as more fluid, consisting of “the negotiation of multiple loyalties and identities, the relationship between the “home” and the “world,” the political and theoretical implications of border crossing, and the identity of the dislocated diasporized female subject.”<sup>93</sup>

For example, Hong Kong Chinese Americans left Hong Kong and live in the liminal space of the love-hate relationship of being called “Chinese.” Many Hong Kong immigrants left Hong Kong in fear of the political future under the Chinese communist regime. They brought their families to the US for a brighter

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<sup>92</sup> William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transitional Studies* 1, no.1 (1991), 83-99, accessed April 9, 2017, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/443574/pdf>.

<sup>93</sup> Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 46.

future and found themselves more loyal to the “old Hong Kong” under the British rule than to its current political authority. Many Hong Kong immigrants felt grateful about their relocation to the US, Australia, and Canada while lamenting the fact that the “old Hong Kong” is gone. However, they face challenges in transitioning to American or “white” culture. Part of their resistance is about being willing to be absorbed by a foreign, Eurocentric culture and risk losing their own. Another reason is that this Eurocentric culture leaves other cultures little room to flourish except through assimilation.

Their critique of Eurocentric ideologies/construction is interwoven with postcolonialism. However, most postcolonialists fail to identify the fact that Imperial and modern-day Japan possess similar power in Asia, especially in Taiwan and Hong Kong. For the past few decades, Japan has a strong cultural influence on Taiwan and Hong Kong. Those powers also provide increased comfort and modern living standards. It is complicated to separate the benefit and the marginalization from the same power. As many Asians feel ambivalent towards the colonial discourse, the reconstruction or imagination of Asian and/or Chinese theologies needs to reflect the reality on the ground, not just the academic view of it. Reexamination of any construct restores relevance to ever-changing lived experiences.

Chinese Christian churches continue to claim to care for Chinese immigrants. However, they are not only oblivious to the struggles of Chinese American women but also fail to identify the distinct characteristics of each generation. Diasporic Chinese female are from multiple and complex cultural,

political, economic, and religious backgrounds and therefore postcolonial feminist theologian like Kwok propose a postcolonial imagination for Asians, especially for Chinese Americans. Kwok defines imagination as a discernment of something not fitting which prompts a search for new images, aware of the complexity of meanings, “to arrive at new patterns of meaning and interpretation.” In her book, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, one can almost hear Kwok asking this question, “Is America a home safe for Asians? For Asian women? Are Asian churches safe for Asian female?”

### **The Coming Together of Feminist Theologians**

There are many reasons for Asian feminist theologians to come together. To create efficient Asian churches is a good reason. Feminist theology means different things in different regions, and there seems to be a discourse among feminist theologians from different regions and generations. It is helpful to keep in mind this earlier discourse when studying and/or doing feminist religious thinking.

Another good reason is to continue the important task of deconstructing authority and power, and bringing various aspects of communicative action back into play. For example, Latin American liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez and American eco-theologian Sallie McFague embed their particular visions of Christian ethical duty among the marginalized. Kwok uses prostomial methodology to engage and protest against Euro-centric ideologies. Others, like Joh, critique the “we/they” mentality in constructing theories.

This coming together can also expand the assumed boundary in academia of listening only to stories of women from the same race or social location. Ethnocentrism can be subtle and subconscious, and it exists in all ethnicities. Listening to stories from a diverse group can promote cross-racial understanding. Many feminist theologians, like Margaret D. Kamitsuka, question the possibility of being “strongly traditioned” yet not “hegemonically authoritative.”<sup>94</sup> There is a risk in cross-cultural listening, but the potential reward is feminist solidarity. Women in all regions and social locations should be able to stand together and support each other even though we may have different agendas. Solidarity in the real world is multicultural and multi-social, but it is not easy to achieve: the key to its success is inclusion and hospitality. It is to treat each person with dignity, not sympathy—as children of God, not as victims.

Many feminist theological works are written in collaboration. Books like *New Feminist Christianity: Many Voices, Many Views* make an important contribution to feminist theological reflection, as they gather diverse voices. However, there is another way of collaboration at which we have still to become adept: several theologians gathering and writing a single article with a sense of deep connection, understanding, negotiation, and celebration. It would be like a special cookout, where every person brings one ingredient and creates a dish together. This one dish showcases all the other ingredients but also blends together nicely. I look forward to one day being part of a group of feminist theologians, from various regions and social locations, who through deep

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<sup>94</sup> Margaret D. Kamitsuka, *Feminist Theology and the Challenge of Difference* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, Jul 20, 2007), 151.

connection contribute to one article on a common topic, such as compassion, forgiveness, love, or healing.

The coming together of feminist Christians creates a brighter future for humanity. Most feminist theologians, of all races and backgrounds, challenge the view that scholarship is primarily an individual activity exercised in isolation from the community. The pioneers of feminism have established a firm foundation and a path for others who follow. Together they did not let differences and uniqueness distract their commonality and goals. Their example suggests that a church can never be stagnant. Kwok, in *New Feminist Christianity: Many Voices, Many Views*, thus articulates the need “to develop the image of God in its plurality and multiplicity.”<sup>95</sup>

Feminist Christianity also needs to be relevant to young women, so that they will continue to pass on the wisdom they acquire. For the past decade or so, feminist theologians have been commended by both men and women. Their theological reflections are inspired by the lived experience of women. Today, the internet and social media networks bring especially young people closer from different parts of the world. Messages and thoughts can be sent to the other part of the earth within seconds. Issues around the world are captured and communicated within minutes. It has never been easier to be in touch with much of the rest of humanity. With the advantages of modern technology, courageous women with a vision to counter injustice and oppression can speak out and have a platform.

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<sup>95</sup> Pui-lan Kwok, “A Postcolonial Feminist Vision for Christianity,” in *New Feminist Christianity: Many Voices, Many Views*, ed. Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2010), 6.

Although there is still much work to be done for the Chinese Adventist and other Asian communities, the future of the world is in our hands.

### **Reflection on Asian Feminist Theology**

Christian feminist theological studies have a dual and timely position – to advocate for women and to establish a path for women’s liberation and flourishing. Because Christianity and other religions have been a source of oppression of women, feminist theologians examine, deconstruct, and reconstruct religious reflections to recreate them as a resource for women’s liberation. Joh explains, “Women’s oppression takes many forms, with race, age, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, ability, and other factors are interwoven. Feminist analysis and practice have recognized this, such that what began as a concern for gender is now a widely differentiated way of seeing structures that privilege some and marginalize others.”<sup>96</sup>

Feminist Christianity embraces a diversity of scholarship and practices. It is reshaping religious institutions and religious life in more holistic, inclusive, and justice-focused ways. One crucial reflection is that feminist theologians continue to be challenged by the dominance of hetero-patriarchy in Christian theological tradition. Feminist theology, foremost among other forms of theological studies, must continue to grapple with the reality of sexism in the lives of women and men. At the

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<sup>96</sup> Hunt and Neu, ed., foreword to *New Feminist Christianity*, xv.

heart of sexism is the construction of gender polarization, in which femininity and masculinity are assumed to be delineated, and any transgression of this pattern warrants punitive measures.<sup>97</sup>

The social construction of gender and racial identity is essential not only because of the powerful ways that they influence us and how we come to know ourselves but also because any kind of polaristic mindset pertains to a one-dimensional identity. Often, in social and religious settings, men's view of women is much different than God's. The bottom line question is: "Can a woman be free to flourish and recognize her beauty the way God sees her?"

### *The Challenges beyond a Misogynistic Construct*

There are many different forms of marginalization for Chinese American women as well as all women. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that feminism is plural. Moreover, she coined the word, "Kyriarchy," to describe her theory of an individual's interconnectedness, interaction, and self-extension of domination, oppression, and submission.<sup>98</sup> Together with Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's idea of

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<sup>97</sup> W. Anne Joh, "Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality: Integrating the Diverse Politics of Identity into Our Theology," in *New Feminist Christianity, Many Voices, Many Views*, ed. Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2010), 55.

<sup>98</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 28-32.



intersectionality, feminist theological reflections, now and in the future, can continue to challenge the constructs of patriarchy and gender.<sup>99</sup>

In Fiorenza's view, kyriarchy is domination, a system by which one person or a group holds age, gender, race, class, religion, sexual orientation, power, and other constructs of dominating hierarchies over other individual(s) instead of God. Fiorenza stresses that kyriarchy is a Lord-centered system in which those serving or subordinate experience the "full power of kyriarchal oppression."<sup>100</sup> To maintain this system, kyriarchical leaders rely on the creation of a servant class, race, gender, or people, designating another less than because of their education, culture, religion, and socialization. As the kyriarchy system is recognized as a standard construct, its oppressive structures become normalized.<sup>101</sup> Liberation involves challenging the "norm."

### *Final Thoughts*

In an age of rapid globalization, it is not surprising to say that feminist theology must also focus on finding ways to create a just and sustainable existence. Colonization, imperialism, and neoliberalism have left an indelible mark on many lives and nations. Race, gender, and

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<sup>99</sup> Schüssler, *Wisdom Ways: Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 28-32.

<sup>100</sup> Schüssler, *Wisdom Ways: Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 33-37.

<sup>101</sup> Schüssler, *Wisdom Ways: Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 33-37.

sexuality have been used and deployed to mark the bodies that have been excluded and even abandoned.<sup>102</sup>

Moreover, globalization is shifting towards global "financialization." Both situations cause the massive devastation of vulnerable people and creation. A privileged few accumulate wealth and resources beyond their needs at the expense of the many who experience unprecedented crises of hunger, forced migration, disease, and death, and out of this mix, defiance, and violence.<sup>103</sup> This can be a motivation to challenge the "norms" of dominant powers. The deconstructive and reconstructive theological moves of liberation theologies like feminism must continue so that we begin to reimagine the divine and this creation sacred as living in abundance rather than rooted in competition and scarcity and therefore capable of embracing all rather than excluding some.<sup>104</sup>

Feminist theology must give critical attention to the ways that the allegedly finest forms of socialization in the globe are defending and perpetuating the suffering of masses of people worldwide. Feminist theologians argue that all lives are sacred. They are to further healing of all persons from marginalization.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Schüssler, *Wisdom Ways: Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 89-90.

<sup>103</sup> Schüssler, *Wisdom Ways: Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 90.

<sup>104</sup> Schüssler, *Wisdom Ways: Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 102-103.

<sup>105</sup> Schüssler, *Wisdom Ways: Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 104-107.

Women around the world, with or without the awareness of oppression, are longing to flourish. They also want their daughters to blossom. Women serve their families, communities, companies, churches, and God. Each human being is gifted uniquely and reflecting the creativity of the Divine. Stereotypes, especially towards gender role, distort the gift and limit women to live out their full potential. Quoting Maria Pilar Aquino,

No future is possible without justice for women. No future is feasible without human rights for women. No future is a viable without meeting women's basic human need. No future of feminist Christianity can flourish without a just world.<sup>106</sup>

Christian Feminist movements fuel and empower me to speak to sexism, injustice, stereotypes, and oppression. I become courageous in being the voice of many Chinese women, especially younger women. I realize by claiming a voice, I am also giving a voice to them, and at the same time, challenging the norm.

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<sup>106</sup> Maria Pilar Aquino, "Analysis, Interconnectedness, and Peacebuilding for a Just World," in *New Feminist Christianity*, 41.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SUMMARY OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST BELIEF AND PRACTICES

The goal of this chapter is to describe the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church by briefly summarizing its history, core beliefs, culture, and practices. With this in mind, it explains how the history of Chinese Christianity has shaped the experience of Chinese Adventists, especially female ones. Special attention is also paid to Adventist views on women and women's leadership in North America, and specifically in Chinese diaspora in the US. To that end, this chapter surveys two recent North American Adventist studies, which have identified sources of religious discontent among Adventist young adults in general. The chapter concludes by discussing the current gaps in spiritual development, nurturing, and healing for Adventist Chinese and Chinese American women.

#### **Brief History of Christian Spirituality in China**

Early Western missionaries played an outsize role in the development of Chinese Christianity. Roman Catholics, such as Matteo Ricci (a Jesuit priest), initiated Christian missionary outreach to China in the early 1600s. Most early Western missionaries went to Asia with a colonizing mindset, which meant that they sought not only to convert people to Christianity, but also to devalue pre-Christian native cultures. Some exceptions such as Ricci, who initially sought to integrate Buddhism with Christianity in China. He later realized that the way to reach influential officials was through Confucianism and Daoism. Ricci's successor, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, also affirmed Chinese values and culture in

the hopes of influencing authentic Asian spirituality. However, other early missionaries preached against things such as Chinese ancestor worship, and sought to redirect such shows of Confucian filial piety towards the veneration of Christian saints instead. A long controversy among missionaries about adapting native cultures existed until the 1700s and beyond. Protestant missionaries took things one step further by claiming that all non-Judeo-Christian rituals were “pagan,” and were therefore not only wrong, but often damnable sins as well.<sup>107</sup>

In subsequent centuries, it became common practice for missionaries to shun religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Missionaries insisted that Chinese converts completely abandon all practices connected to their native religious experiences, so that they could assimilate completely into Western Christianity. Their demands bore mixed results, as not all Chinese were willing to accept the missionaries’ demands.<sup>108</sup>

In 1966 to 1976, the fierce religious persecution that was part of the Chinese Cultural Revolution devastated Christianity in China and destroyed both missionary effort and traditional Chinese culture. Both native Chinese and foreign Christians were put into prison or killed by the communist party. Among others effects, the Chinese Cultural Revolution had made major impact on traditional Chinese culture and Christianity in China. Forced into survival mode, churches clung to spiritual ways taken directly from the Bible without considering their

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<sup>107</sup> Scott Sunquist, *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 139-141.

<sup>108</sup> Sunquist, *Dictionary Asian Christianity*, 142-143.

Chinese contexts.<sup>109</sup> It is a complex movement. As Chinese traditions are being disvalued by both missionaries and Chinese themselves, many Chinese Christians began to adapt to the Western Christian construct but with a Confucian mindset – duty, obligation, and role fulfillment.<sup>110</sup>

In the book, *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading*, John Yueh-Han Yieh gives detailed accounts of the history of Christianity in China. Western missionary activities began as early as the seventh century in China and were banned in 1720 due to the offensive elimination of ancestor worship in the Qing Dynasty. The first Protestant missionary, Robert Morrison, along with other missionaries, translated the Bible with an emphasis on its authority. The conversion of the Chinese people to Christianity was the primary goal of the missionaries. The ethical teaching of Jesus was highlighted as it parallels what is familiar to the Chinese population from the Confucian teaching. Later during 1800s and early 1900s, missionaries were sent out to Africa and China along with the Western movement of industrialization. Many Western churches built hospitals and schools to help the local people. The establishment of the Communist Party in 1949 ended many missionary activities except the ones approved by the Three-Self Patriotic Church. Love, obedience, and service are the themes of Mainland Chinese theology.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Sunquist, *Dictionary Asian Christianity*, 144-145.

<sup>110</sup> Sunquist, *Dictionary Asian Christianity*, 209-210.

<sup>111</sup> John Yueh-Han Yieh, “Chinese Biblical Interpretation,” in *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading*, ed. Mary Fokkett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan (St Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 16–28.

Many missionaries moved to Taiwan. Taiwan churches enjoy relative freedom but they are discouraged from political and social engagements. They suffered different kinds of hardship. As Taiwanese fled from China, many suffered loss in the form of forced separation from families who were left behind in China. Consequently, many theological narratives and reflections are around those suffering and hardship.

Political movements and wars created diverse experiences in the Chinese race. In Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, Chinese Christians share their lived experience with other multicultural and multi-religious societies. For example, Hong Kongers transition from colonial rule to neo-colonial living under the construct of Sino-Marxism. While some Hong Kong theologians focus on gender equality and interfaith dialogue, some focus on cross-textual approach.

As I have observed, conservative Chinese Christians, who are also more inclined to Confucian mindset tend to base their beliefs on a well-defined, traditional concept of God. They also practice a very self-disciplined spirituality. In contrast, more liberal Protestant Christians tend to develop a dynamic inner quality of life; they are more open to the idea of an ongoing discovery of God.

Nonetheless, most pastors serving in Chinese churches in North America are immigrants and they continue to carry the theological interest and influence from “home” as they shepherd their congregations. Many church leaders are not interested in Asian American postcolonial and/or feminist theologies. Their focus is far more on Asian and Asian American biblical interpretation, which is highly contextual with the intention of preserving culture. Native language is very

important in worship services, songs, praises, scripture reading, and prayers. Biblical truths and discipline are the focal point of sermons. Self-discipline and works-based spirituality continue to be the foundation of many sermons. Hence, for example, Jesus' Great Commission largely conveys a sense of duty, obligation, and guilt to Chinese American Christians rather than one of grace and opportunity.

The second generations do not share the same religiosity as their parents. Conflicts and tension between generations are a common phenomenon in the Chinese American community. Many older Chinese American Christians desire to be religious and they long for harmony, rest, and the coming of "permanent home." Meanwhile, young people are losing faith in Christian religion. Both generations are in need of healing, support, and compassion from God.

### **History and Spirituality of Seventh-day Adventists in North America**

In the late eighteenth century, a revival movement called the Second Great Awakening took place in the United States. The increased availability of Bibles allowed many to purchase and study the Scriptures for themselves rather than just hear them preached. Conversion was the focus. This movement has also motivated a drive to long for the second coming of Jesus and the outpouring of faith. The result of this message led to the establishment of many reform movements within Protestant churches, including the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations. Some factions of the movement embraced beliefs which would later be adopted by the Seventh-day Adventists.



The development later became the Seventh-day Adventist Church was formed out of the faction known as Millerism. In around 1831, a Baptist convert, William Miller, began to preach that the Second Advent of Jesus would occur in 1843 or 1844, based on his interpretation of Daniel 8:14. Protestants from Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Christian Connection churches followed William Miller. They studied and linked the cleansing of the sanctuary of Daniel 8:14 with the Jewish Day of Atonement, and proclaimed that the date of Jesus' second Advent would be October 22, 1844 (Miller called it the "Blessed Hope"). Many of the Millerite believers gradually accepted the advent message, got together on October 22<sup>rd</sup> and waited for Christ to return. Then they were bitterly disappointed. This event became known to Adventists as the Great Disappointment.<sup>112</sup>

After the Great Disappointment of 1844, many of Miller's followers were left troubled and disheartened. While most stopped believing in the imminent return of Jesus, some simply believed the date was wrong and adjusted their expectations accordingly. Likewise, a few believed that the date was correct, but that the event they had expected was incorrect.<sup>113</sup> One among this group, a man named Hiram Edson shared one of his impressions or visions that heaven was opened to his view. Edson says,

"I saw distinctly, and clearly, that instead of our High Priest coming out of the Most Holy of the heavenly sanctuary to come to this earth...at the end of the 2,300 days, that he for the first time entered on that day the second apartment of that sanctuary and that he had a work to perform in the Most Holy before coming to this

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<sup>112</sup> Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Takoma Park, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1945), 61-65.

<sup>113</sup> Nichol, *Midnight Cry*, 61-65.

earth.... While I was thus standing in the midst of the field, my comrade passed on almost beyond speaking distance before missing me. He inquired why I was stopping so long. I replied, ‘The Lord was answering our morning prayer, by giving light with regard to our disappointment.’<sup>114</sup>

Edson shared this encounter with the local Adventist believers, which was greatly encouraged by it. This later became a core belief of the Adventist church. They were led to a new understanding about the sanctuary in heaven, where Jesus is the High Priest, interceding for all who believe in Him. An Adventist believer, Joseph Bates, was worshiping with a young Seventh-day Baptist layperson named Rachel Preston, he introduced Millerite Adventists to the idea that the Sabbath should be on Saturday, or, the seventh day of the week.

The early pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism often saw their meetings as opportunities to discuss and reach conclusions about doctrinal issues, among them the precise timing of Sabbath. The group later organized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. While initially it was decided that Sabbath starts at 6 pm on Fridays, by 1855, it was generally accepted that Sabbath begins at sunsets on Fridays and ends at the next sunset. The Adventist group also developed a theological platform in the early 1860s. As the group began to grow, by 1863, they saw the importance to organize with three levels of government: the local church, the regional conference, and the General Conference.<sup>115</sup>

The early Adventist church co-founders were Joseph Bates, and James and Ellen White. They believed that the Adventists had been given the mission to

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<sup>114</sup> Hiram, Edson, “Life and Experience,” n.d., Manuscript Fragment, Ellen G. White Research Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs.

<sup>115</sup> Nichol, *Midnight Cry*, 61-65.

finish the work of spreading Christ's good news to all corners of the world. The co-founders were mission oriented. They moved the denomination towards education, medical work, as well as publications. After venturing into Europe, the Adventist church became a global denomination with missionaries in Africa, Asia, and Australia by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **History of Seventh-day Adventists in China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan**

Hong Kong was the first stop for Adventist evangelists in the greater China region. Abram La Rue, an independent colporteur, was the first Christian to seek converts there. He began his mission in 1888 by evangelizing sailors in Hong Kong. He entered Canton the same year, and went to Shanghai the year after. In 1889, the Adventist church voted to establish an official mission in China, and in 1906 Canton became the Adventist headquarters in China. Another missionary, Ida Thompson, started an English school for Chinese children in Hong Kong in 1902. The missionaries then built schools in Canton. In 1930, China was closed and separated from the Adventist Far Eastern section due to the Japanese invasion. Hong Kong and Macau remained in the same conference, however, as they were under British and Portuguese rule respectively. To this day, there is no official Adventist organizational structure in China.

Between 1907 and 1912, Chinese Adventist laypersons began to canvas in Taiwan. World War II temporarily closed the doors to Adventism there. After World War II, though, the church commissioned P.S. Lin to re-start work in Taiwan, and the Adventist Taiwanese mission was established in 1949. During

China's Cultural Revolution, Adventist missionaries fled to Taiwan, and funds from the church's headquarters were diverted to the island. Today, there are a total of three SDA hospitals and seven schools in Taiwan.

### **The Spiritual Belief and Practices of Seventh-day Adventists**

To understand Adventism, one must know the twenty-eight core doctrines of Adventist belief.<sup>116</sup> To summarize, these are: upholding the Old and New Testaments as the written Word of God. The scriptures are infallible and authoritative. God is a unity of three—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God created the universe, in a recent six-day creation, and rested on the seventh day. Man and woman were made in the image of God and empowered with freedom. “All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe.”<sup>117</sup>

The Sabbath is meant to be a day of rest and worship, which allows people to commune delightfully with God and one another. Adventists see the church as the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In Christ they are a new creation. God gives spiritual gifts to His church in every

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<sup>116</sup> The Seventh-day Adventist Church 28 Fundamental Beliefs are provided in Appendix 1.

<sup>117</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “The 28 Fundamental Beliefs,” Adventist, accessed October 16, 2017, <https://www.adventist.org/fileadmin/adventist.org/files/articles/official-statements/28Beliefs-Web.pdf>.

age, for the common good of both the church and humanity. The church's hope is the second coming of Christ.<sup>118</sup>

Within these doctrines, Adventists are familiar with the four pillars of SDA belief and practices—Sabbath, Bible study, prayer, and prophecy. They are meant to permeate a believer's life:

1. Sabbath – is a day of rest. Sabbath observance originated in the book of Genesis. After God's creation, God rested from work on the seventh day. Every week, Adventists see Sabbath as having a "special date" with God, a guilt-free break from work, and a whole day to deepen friendship with their Creator. It is a day to receive the gift of rest and worship the Creator. In Adventism, Sabbath is a way to safeguard one's relationship with God. "The Sabbath protects man's friendship with God and provides the time essential for the development of that relationship."<sup>119</sup>

In Exodus 20, believers are reminded to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates."<sup>120</sup>

The Adventist church believes that the Sabbath "points men and women to the spiritual and to the personal. The consequences for forgetting to keep the

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<sup>118</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, "The 28 Fundamental Beliefs."

<sup>119</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Sabbath Observance," Adventist, last modified, July 9, 1990, <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/documents/article/go/-/sabbath-observance/>.

<sup>120</sup> Exodus 20:8-10 (NIV).

Sabbath day holy are serious. It will lead to the distortion and eventual destruction of a person's relationship with God.”<sup>121</sup> Sabbath-keeping is a joy and delight because one has “entered into God’s rest and has accepted the invitation to fellowship with Him.”<sup>122</sup>

On July 9, 1990, the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Executive Committee voted at the General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana, to embrace the Sabbath observance. As a result, children from Adventist families are taught to observe Sabbath diligently. This is an important component of their spiritual development. The parents bear an enormous responsibility to provide a delightful Sabbath structure and atmosphere for their children. Family worship, church attendance, and Sabbath observance are important to Christian living. To this end, the Adventist church promotes certain activities as appropriate for Sabbaths:

Sabbath afternoons, as far as possible, will be spent in family activities – exploring nature; making missionary visits to shut-ins, the sick, or others in need of encouragement; and attending meetings in the church. As the children grow older, activities will enlarge to encompass other members of their age group in the church, with the question always in mind, "Does this activity cause me to understand better the true nature and sacredness of the Sabbath?" Thus proper Sabbath observance in the home will have a lasting influence for time and eternity.<sup>123</sup>

Chinese American families also observe the Sabbath in a very similar way.

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<sup>121</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Sabbath Observance.”

<sup>122</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Sabbath Observance.”

<sup>123</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Sabbath Observance.”

2. Bible study – Most Adventists are committed to studying the Bible, as well as to accepting and following biblical truth using all interpretive methods consistent with what Scripture says of itself. Adventists consider the Bible to be a love letter, storybook, history lesson, self-help guide, and inspiration.<sup>124</sup> They read the Bible to gain knowledge of a loving God and Christian living, to learn from history and others' experiences, and to gain hope and peace through its reminders about God's promises<sup>125</sup> They read the Bible to gain knowledge of a loving God and Christian living, to learn from history and others' experiences, and to have hope and peace through reminding themselves of the promises of God.<sup>126</sup> Part of the official statement of the stance of the Adventist Church in regards to Bible study is displayed in appendix 2.

3. Prayer – As the pioneer of the Adventist church, Ellen White, wrote, “Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend.” To Adventists, prayer is what fuels and develops our relationship with God. When they take time to speak directly with God, they can discover that God takes the time to reply and transform us into God's love.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods,” Adventist, accessed January 26, 2018, <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/documents/article/go/-/methods-of-bible-study/>.

<sup>125</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods,” Adventist, accessed January 26, 2018, <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/documents/article/go/-/methods-of-bible-study/>.

<sup>126</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Bible Study.”

<sup>127</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Prayers,” Adventist, accessed April 18, 2017, <https://www.adventist.org/en/spirituality/prayer/>.

According to the Adventist official statement, a prayer is also “the direct connect to God.”<sup>128</sup> Prayer is a simple act of conversing with God:

It’s about talking with the Creator of the Universe: whether aloud or in our thoughts, during special or ordinary moments, when we’re on the move or before we go to bed. It’s the privilege we get as His children—a direct connection to God. No voicemail messages, no call waiting.

Some may see prayer as a one-way conversation, or even worse, a conversation with ourselves, but studies have shown that not only does it improve our quality of life, it actually has the power to heal. Scientists say interactions with God through prayer give us the ability to better manage our negative emotions and reduce our aggression towards others.<sup>129</sup>

Prayer life is emphasized in Adventist culture worldwide. Chinese Adventists have fully embraced the introduction of prayers from the missionaries.

4. Prophecy – Adventists believe prophecies are God’s way of continuing conversations with the community. They believe that God provided a special prophet named Ellen G. White. “In the last days, as in biblical times, the Holy Spirit has blessed God’s people with the gift of prophecy.”<sup>130</sup> The official statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is as follows:

This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and the Adventist Church believes it was manifested in the ministry of White. Her writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. Seventh-day Adventists believe prophecy is a prediction of what will happen in the future, we also know that it has to do with much more—it has to do with God’s deep desire to stay in contact with the people He loves—us. God’s prophets are His messengers, appointed to speak His words. Our human nature made it impossible for us to see God face-to-

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<sup>128</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Prayers.”

<sup>129</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Prayers.”

<sup>130</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “The Gift of Prophecy,” Adventist, accessed January 29, 2018, <https://www.adventist.org/en/beliefs/church/the-gift-of-prophecy/>.



face. But just because we have to keep our distance does not mean He must remain silent.

Adventists believe prophecies are God's way of continuing his conversation with us. And ultimately, it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus, the epitome of God's message of love—that He would die for us to save our souls.<sup>131</sup>

These fundamental doctrines and four main practices display the core beliefs of the SDA church. Many first-generation Adventists, including Chinese Americans, are attracted to Adventism because of its doctrinal beliefs. However, the church faces challenges as the rising generations seek more and different kinds of meaning from its practices. They seem to require deeper connections to meet their spiritual needs.

### **Two North American Adventist Studies**

The SDA church has noticed the increased disengagement of its young adults. In 2015, the SDA General Conference commissioned the Barna Group to conduct a cross-sectional “Seventh Day Adventist Young Adult Study,” focused on members aged 18 to 29. Its goals were to determine which factors influenced young Adventist members to become engaged with their local churches, and to see if church engagement during childhood affected the later faith engagement of adults.

One of the significant findings was that the frequency with which a young person moved churches during childhood has a strong correlation with their church engagement. The higher the frequency, the lower the engagement. Also, the study showed that the SDA church, as a whole, does not make young people

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<sup>131</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Gift Prophecy.”

feel accepted. As a matter of fact, 40 percent of participants do not engage in church, because they see that church leaders do not tolerate doubts, are overprotective of their youth, and repress individuals with different opinions.<sup>132</sup>

This study shows that young Adventists, in general, do not feel at home in their faith community. Due to their parents' authoritarian relational style, young Chinese or Chinese American Adventists often attend church services out of obligation or habit. Their spirituality is largely defined by regular church attendance, and nothing more. Most Chinese Adventist churches cater to the needs of their adult members by creating a safe environment which preserves Chinese culture. Consequently, these churches largely neglect the struggles of their younger members. They are expected to be voiceless and subservient, whether at home or at church. When these young people raise challenging questions, their elders typically tell them that they are losing their faith, or that they do not trust God enough. Parents also feel that they are "losing face" when their children ask the pastors what the adults deem to be unconventional questions. As a result, attending church has become little more than a cultural event for many young Chinese American Adventists. In many cases, they move away after they find work and then end their engagement with their childhood religion altogether.

A 2013 study, entitled "Seventh-day Adventist Millennials and the Church," found that there are six areas in which the younger generation of Adventists exhibit greater discontent than the national norms, namely: 1) Anti-

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<sup>132</sup> Barna Group, "Seventh Day Adventist Young Adult Study," Seventh-Day Adventist Church, accessed on February 5, 2017, <http://www.youngadulthoodlife.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Barna-SDA-Millennials-Report-final.pdf>.

science, 2) Repressiveness, 3) Overprotectiveness, 4) Exclusivity, 5) Shallowness, and 6) Doubtlessness.<sup>133</sup> This study does not contain much description of the collected data, but the tension between Adventism and science, openness, and inclusivity is clear. The tension is the result of many Adventist Millennials seeking to expand their worldview. They feel that the church is protecting them from, or ignoring, the world's real issues, including LGBTQIA+ matters, poverty, sexual abuse, and other social challenges. Sermons in Chinese American churches typically do not address these; instead, they focus strongly on doctrine. Often, sermon messages are irrelevant to young people's challenges today. In addition, space is unavailable both at school and at home for deeper and more progressive questioning. Hence, young people's needs and thirsts go untended.

These two studies, though small and general in scope, provide insight into the emotional and spiritual needs of young male and female Chinese American Adventists. Younger Americans are being shaped with open-mindedness and tolerance by mainstream American culture. Thus, most young adults are willing to gloss over differences to find common ground with others. As many Chinese Adventist leaders remain staunchly attached to their own spiritual and cultural beliefs, and unwilling even to consider others' views, young Chinese Adventists have begun to see the Adventist Church as exclusive and irrelevant.

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<sup>133</sup> Rodlie Ortiz, "Seventh-day Adventist Millennials and the Church," *Modern Ekklesia*, last modified November 5, 2013, <http://www.modernekklesia.com/seventh-day-adventist-millennials/>.

## ***The Need for Additional Spiritual Practices and Lack of Healing Agents in the Adventist Chinese American Community***

Although prayer is viewed as one of the most important spiritual practices, Adventists, especially Chinese—young and old alike—do not have a complete view of prayer. In *Step to Christ*, Ellen White says that prayers, “An unceasing prayer is the unbroken union of the soul with God, so that life from God flows into our life; and from our life, purity and holiness flow back to God.”<sup>134</sup>

Similarly, in *Our High Calling*, she writes:

When men have to swim against the stream, there is a weight of waves driving them back. Let him hear the whisper, “Let us pray.” The Holy Spirit will give a rich experience to both. It is PRAYER that unites hearts. It is PRAYER to the Great Physician to heal the soul that will bring the blessing of God. PRAYER unites us with one another and with God. PRAYER brings Jesus to our side, and gives new strength and fresh grace to the fainting, perplexed soul to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil.<sup>135</sup>

Early Adventists practiced prayer as their primary devotion to God. Prayer among today’s Chinese Adventists has been reduced to a well-defined ritual which revolves around specific, traditional types of voiced prayers. Chinese Adventist women and men may lack spiritual nurturing by their community as they are not inspired to explore a diverse prayer life. Chinese Adventists are particularly drawn to a disciplined Christian life, focusing on doctrinal truths and Sabbath-keeping. Prayers are mostly taught as verbal petitions and expressions of thanksgiving to God.

As prayer is typically the first Adventist spiritual practice that parents pass on to their children, they grow up saying prayers in the morning, before meals, before bedtime, and whenever they need help. They learn to thank God for

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<sup>134</sup> Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1892), 98.

<sup>135</sup> Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling* (Washington D. C.: Review and Herald, 1961), 177.

blessings in prayers. In other words, like so many Christians, they are taught to be verbal in their prayers—rather than silent, reflective, and/or even physically active (e.g. praying while walking).

Adventists are keen on saying prayers and voicing their hearts' desire to their Creator. However, prayer often stops there. Traditional Adventists see verbal prayers as the “gold standard” of prayer. As prayers are typically limited to petition and thanksgiving, silence, much less waiting for God's response, during prayer are rarely practiced and are considered to be somewhat frightening. Non-traditional Adventist spiritual practices are controversial subjects. Many Adventist members and leaders believe that Satan can use those moments to interfere or misdirect. Many Adventists, and especially women, are deprived of healing because of the lack of concrete spiritual practices within the faith community, and the fear of “doing the wrong thing.”

Because prayers are viewed mostly as agenda-driven, one-way communications to God—shared with purpose and filled with requests—Adventists typically understand God's responses as limited to “yes,” “no,” and “wait.” While praying, it is uncommon to expect a response from God directly. Often, they will interpret signs and results as God's response. In addition, they connect prayers and faith; as such, when prayers seem to go unanswered, their faith can be tested and their prayer lives can suffer. Also, the fear of “going down a wrong path” prevents them from exploring other ways of prayer, as does the fact that most immigrant Chinese Adventists are conservative and prefer to mimic missionaries' teachings on prayer from over a century ago. Consequently, their

prayer practices are confined to the traditional types of voiced prayers. Going beyond the boundary of what they were taught somehow takes these individuals out of their comfort zone. In the meantime, their relationships with God suffer, and many people miss out on the tremendous blessings which prayer can bring them.

Therefore, Chinese Adventist Churches, like other traditional Christian communities, lack tangible spiritual practices to enrich religious living, and to foster healing from guilt, shame, and despair—all common afflictions in Chinese culture. Most of the time, Chinese church leaders simply enjoin the sufferers to have faith or offer them a prayer with some scriptures for comfort. The hearts' deep desires are often untouched even in private pastoral settings.

This is an area of urgent need, not least because so many Chinese immigrant families—and especially their women—are in crisis. These suffering women do not have sufficient spiritual support for calming and healing themselves, as they are unfamiliar with any “safe” spiritual practices other than prayers of petition. They hurt in silence and their church does not have a way to help them.

The concept of receiving God's compassion and healing through prayer is a foreign idea for them, and they are skeptical about any spiritual practices beyond the four pillars of Adventism. It is the intent of this dissertation to offer a few other non-compromising, practical, spiritual practices, which fit within the beliefs of Adventism. These may serve as an invitation to come into God's healing presence, rest in the divine grace, bask in God's love, yield to God's

guidance, and heal under God's compassion. Prayers and other faithful observances can foster spiritual growth, restoration, healing, and transformation. When Chinese Adventist women have meaningful spiritual practices and fulfilling prayer lives in Jesus, with God, and through the Holy Spirit, they can lead much fuller and less painful existences.

In general, there seems to be spiritual development gaps between reading scriptures, believing in God, attending church services, and connecting with the Holy Spirit. Practices that focus on different stages of life and matters other than philosophical and cognitive development are needed. All Adventist spiritual practices are vital to spiritual growth, but I suggest that additional practices would benefit all Adventists, and particularly Chinese and Chinese American Adventist women.

Adventism started as a movement of the Holy Spirit. Early Adventists proclaimed their recognition of the Holy Spirit, and they focused their prayers and connections through the Holy Spirit. Adventist scholars and teachers would do well to re-examine, recognize, and rediscover Ellen G. White's fluid connection with God and femaleness in her writings. Just as the co-founder of the SDA church identified her divine affirmation, so too do Adventist women in general need to learn how to affirm themselves in God. Through openness towards the Holy Spirit, rather than a focus on intellectual spirituality and self-discipline, they can become empowered to realize their need and seek healing and liberation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### NAMING THE STRUGGLES OF FIRST- AND SECOND-GENERATION OF CHINESE AMERICAN ADVENTIST WOMEN

This chapter presents a thick description of the interconnected struggles of Chinese American Adventist women, which include: 1) the struggles of liminal living; 2) the struggles imposed by the Confucian tradition; 3) the struggles towards, and need for, women's liberation, as well as and women's headship and authority in the Adventist community; 4) the lack of adequate spiritual practices and healing agents in the Adventist Chinese American community; and 5) a personal narrative exemplifying such struggles.

#### **The Struggles of Liminal Living**

##### *Living in a Liminal Space*

Chinese American Adventist women face double social marginalization and liminality. Just like other Asian Americans, they experience in-betweenness: they do not belong entirely to either the American society in which they live, or their original homeland (regardless of whether it is inside or outside of Mainland China). Many realize they are forgetting some of their original language, and yet their English remains "imperfect." In addition, they encounter patriarchal sexism at home, at church, and throughout society at large. Taken together, these create layers of obstruction which prevent them from tasting liberation and freedom.



Among the distinct lived experiences of Asian immigrants is the sense of being—or being labeled—a perpetual, “eternal” foreigner. This stereotype prevents immigrants, especially young ones, from feeling as though they belong to American society. Sue, Bucci, Lin, Nadal, and Torino state that the perpetual foreigner stereotype is particularly salient for Asian Americans.<sup>136</sup> Many are being treated as aliens in the land. Targeted mostly at Asians (even those with perfect American-accented English), questions like, “Where are you from?,” “No, where are you originally from?,” “Wow! Your English is perfect!,” and “Where did you learn your English?” can elicit feelings of inferiority, discomfort, and isolation. They are often deliberate, if sometimes subconscious, efforts to “other” Asian Americans.<sup>137</sup>

Chinese immigrants came to “The Land of Opportunity” to seek core American values of freedom and equality. But the perception that they are perpetual foreigners and second-class citizens translates into their not being “as American” as European Americans. More significantly, Chinese immigrant children and teenagers associate “Americanness” with “Whiteness,” and so they often sense that they are being treated like foreigners. On the one hand, they feel pressured by mainstream American culture to be “true Americans.” On the other hand, they are shamed by their families when they embrace mainstream American culture. This affects their emotional well-being, as well as their identity formation

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<sup>136</sup> D.W. Sue, J. Bucci, A.I. Lin, K.L. Nadal, and G.C. Torino, “Racial Micro-Aggressions and the Asian American Experience,” in *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, no.1 (2007): 72–81, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17227179>.

<sup>137</sup> Sue et al., “Racial Micro-aggressions.”

process. Their awareness of being seen as “less than American” may also influence their adjustment, transition, and self-perception.

To add to the complexity, immigrant mothers do not identify with the emotional needs of the next generation. In addition, they feel pressured to raise “perfect” children. Most of the time, the two generations live in two different “worlds.” The first-generation was taught to show their love by providing good education and strict discipline to their children. But this only exacerbates the disconnect young people feel from their families. As they witness the struggles of their mothers, the next generation is naturally affected emotionally and spiritually by the wounds that such Adventist mothers carry.

### ***The Tension of Cultural Transitioning***

Most American-born Chinese desire to grow their roots in the land they call home. It is natural and healthy for them to find a home in the US. The more they perceive themselves as not being accepted by mainstream American society, the harder they try to fit in. Therefore, many immigrant children speak English only. They disown Chinese traditions and “act normal” to avoid prejudice and feel as if they belong. In addition, mainstream American culture provides a sense of freedom. They long to become who they want to be. Young Chinese Americans who feel that they are to remain as “foreign” struggle with their national identity and have a sense of cultural homelessness.

While children from immigrant families struggle to transition into mainstream culture through school and friends, their parents do not often validate

their desire to assimilate. They fear losing their entire “home” culture, even though most of them voluntarily moved to the US. Yet it is difficult, if not impossible, for the second-generation to exist in and maintain both cultures simultaneously. Conversely, the Euro-dominant American culture makes it difficult for “other,” non-white, young immigrants to maintain all of their identities. It would be wonderful if other cultures were more acceptable to the broader society, but this ideal has not yet become a reality.

Most Chinese immigrant parents do not understand their children’s struggles. To maintain their home culture, many Chinese Adventist parents make enormous financial sacrifices to enroll their children in private Adventist schools, and only allow them to make friends with other Asians. They accept the reality of being stereotyped, and therefore Chinese churches became a safe haven for them. In turn, there are no other choices for the second-generation but to also attend Chinese churches. In an attempt to maintain traditional values and traditions, like honoring elders, Chinese church leadership often pays more attention to the desires of the first- generation and neglects the needs of the second-generation.

First-generation Chinese Americans seek a brighter future for themselves and their descendants through professional success, yet they refuse to let their children adapt naturally to their new contexts. Therefore, the emotional disconnection between children and parents widens progressively with age. Many children, even in their fifties and sixties, remain silent in order to keep the peace but this only ensures that their voices continue to be muffled. Lacking their own

identity, they live life quite disconnected from themselves and others, despite being successful in their careers.

Some Chinese Adventist parents begin to understand this problem as conflict with their children continues. In response, they may implement changes to foster some degree of autonomy in their offspring. These liberties, however, come at the cost of tension, guilt, and shame. Grandparents pressure parents to maintain the “Chinese culture.” In turn, parents are forced into a liminal space where they bear the weight in order to serve as an inter-cultural bridge for their children. In fact, cultural transitioning has several layers of tension. One is being stereotyped as the model minority.

### ***The Model Minority Discourse***

Asians in the United States and Canada, regardless of their economic, social, political, and cultural status, are imagined as a “model minority.” There is a fantasy that most Asians living in North America are quiet, emotionless, hardworking, responsible, and intelligent math and music geniuses. Comments such as, “Why are you bad at math? You are Chinese!” are not uncommon. This image is ingrained in American popular culture and reinforced by the media. This only exacerbates the tendency for Chinese immigrant parents to try and live these stereotypes out through themselves and their children.

The image of the model minority was originated by William Petersen, a sociologist, who published the article “Success Story, Japanese-American Style” in *New York Times Magazine* in 1966. “Political conservatives were quick to

utilize the model minority stereotype to argue against the progress of the Civil Right movement and to say that the American dream was colorblind. The message was, ‘If Asian Americans can succeed in America, why not Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans?’ The idea was quickly generalized across all Asian ethnic groups, regardless of their diversity in culture, education, and class”<sup>138</sup> This stereotype is harmful to Chinese Americans, especially students.

On the one hand, it can put Chinese and Asian Americans at odds with other racial groups and create interracial tension. Furthermore, Asian Americans and Asian American students also compete among themselves to uphold social and family expectations.

This image also dismisses the actual racial discrimination faced by many Asian American students, ranging from personal to institutional practices. As such, this stereotype is an unfair burden, expectation, and pressure placed on Chinese and Asian Americans only because of their race. There is a growing literature linking internalized model minority pressure with greater psychological distress. Many young immigrants, particularly females, often become silent and hide their problems. When they grow up, women are expected to be submissive and take on supportive roles only. This only makes them even more like the stereotype.

Many Adventist Chinese immigrant parents further the model minority mindset by assuming that excellent academic performances mirror superior emotional well-being. While neglecting their children’s emotional needs, they also force their religious ideals on their offspring, mandating that specific

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<sup>138</sup> Lee, *Chinese American*, 408–410.

practices, such as “keeping” the Sabbath, be strictly observed. Compounding these realities is the fact the parents are also very focused on pressing children towards academic and other achievements. Young Chinese American Adventists thus frequently feel overwhelmed, confused, suffocated, and socially disconnected. Parents, educators, and spiritual leaders, in general, lack the understanding and awareness to tend to the spiritual and emotional needs of this younger generation.

### ***The Struggles of the Chinese American LGBTQI+ Community in Adventism***

It is critical to mention the LGBTQI+ communities among the Chinese American Adventist community as they, perhaps more than anyone, know what it is to suffer in silence. It is important to know that the existence of homosexuality has been well-documented in China since imperial times. The absence of Christianity in early Chinese history ensured that there was no stigma then attached to being lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender. However, the recent advent of European influence and rule established a core of heavily anti-LGBT laws. Now, due to the impact of Western culture, the Chinese LGBTQI+ community suffers more stringent legal regulations regarding their orientation. Mirroring earlier European and American practices, the Chinese government at one point treated homosexuality with gay aversion shock therapy, and taught that anything but heterosexuality is aberrant and a disease. The government attempted to change the sexual orientation of individuals and cure them of what it insisted was “mental illness.” However, in the modern history of both the Republic of

China and the People's Republic of China, again due to the recent influence of the West, the stigma towards the LGBTQI+ community is gradually decreasing. The current Chinese policy towards LGBTQI+ matters remains the “Three Nos:” no approval, no disapproval, and no promotion.<sup>139</sup> Most Chinese Americans view homosexuality as shame and therefore it is a silenced topic in the community. Nonetheless, it does not mean that there is not a need for understanding.

### ***The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Position on the LGBTQI+ community***

Against that backdrop, this section of the dissertation presents the official SDA stance on LGBTQI+ issues, namely that:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes that every human being is valuable in the sight of God, and we seek to minister to all men and women in the spirit of Jesus. We also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word.<sup>140</sup>

The official statement was voted during the Annual Council of General Conference Executive Committee on Sunday, October 3, 1999, in Silver Spring, Maryland. The following statements were revised by the General Conference Executive Committee, October 17, 2012. They are summarized as follows:

Seventh-day Adventists believe that sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships. Jesus affirmed the dignity of all human beings and reached out

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<sup>139</sup> Yinhe Li, “Chinese Attitudes towards Homosexuality: Ten Questions,” Pei Jin, last modified June 18, 2008, <https://peijin.wordpress.com/2008/06/18/li-yinhe-on-chinese-attitudes-towards-homosexuality-ten-questions/>.

<sup>140</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Official Statement, Homosexuality,” Adventist, accessed on November 20, 2017, <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/-/homosexuality/>.

compassionately to persons and families suffering the consequences of sin. He offered caring ministry and words of solace to struggling people, while differentiating His love for sinners from His clear teaching about sinful practices.<sup>141</sup>

These official statements set the tone; therefore, most Adventist congregations do not engage with LGBTQI+ issues. Young Adventists are eager to address this subject with parents, teachers, and spiritual leaders, yet they are typically met with silence or a reaffirmation of traditional views on sexuality. As they see their friends struggle with identity and belonging, they are confused why the “adults” are not interested in these issues. Consequently, they become disappointed and disengaged from their families and the church.

### ***The Chinese American Adventist LGBTQI+ Community***

Eight percent of the American members in the Adventist faith are Asian. The Pew Research organization discovered that “Seventh-day Adventists are...united in their opposition to homosexuality and same-sex marriage. About six-in-ten (59%) say homosexuality should be discouraged by society, and a similar share (63%) opposes allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally.”<sup>142</sup> Adventist Chinese American LGBTQI+ sexuality and gender identities intersect with Chinese, mainstream American, and Adventist identities. Yet conservative and conformist mindsets have caused many Chinese American

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<sup>141</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Official Statement, Homosexuality.”

<sup>142</sup> Michael Lipka, “A Closer Look at Seventh-day Adventists in America,” Fact-tank, last modified November 3, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/03/a-closer-look-at-seventh-day-adventists-in-america/>.



Adventist parents to take an unaccepting stance towards their LGBTQI+ children. This discourse continues to plague the younger generation as they embrace a more progressive theology, and pursue an inclusive, gracious, and accepting God. They also struggle because they desire social justice and cultural inclusivity, but do not find a place for either ideal in Adventist Chinese churches. As a result, many are disappointed by their church leaders and become angry, bitter, or disconnected from their faith community. Others lose interest in a God represented by what they perceive as a conservative and stagnant body of believers. It is urgent to provide healing for these young people.

### **Struggles under the Confucian Tradition**

Another contributing factor to the struggles of Chinese Adventist women is the long history of gender segregation in China, prior to the Chinese Cultural Revolution in 1966. Confucianism has been heavily criticized over the last few decades, because it is hostile to half of the human population and—at least in the Chinese culture—it has played a significant role in women's marginalization. Still, many Confucian scholars are silent on this matter. Some scholars argue that Confucius might not have had an oppressive attitude toward females. Nevertheless, because his teachings hold such significant sway over Chinese culture, many of his sayings continue even now to contribute to the degradation of women. This is true even in the Chinese American community.

### *Confucius' Teaching and the Analects*

One has to know some Confucian teaching (*Rujia*) and historical background to understand the impact of Confucius, whose Chinese name is Kongzi. He was born in China around 551 BCE and grew up in a modest home. Because his father died when Kongzi was three, his mother raised him in poverty and hardship. It was this hardship that shaped Kongzi's way of connecting with ordinary people. His philosophy aimed to create well-being throughout all of ancient China. Confucius was an educator and a government administrator. As described in greater depth below, his major work was the *Analects*, a book of collated conversations which spans twenty chapters, along with five hundred independent passages.

In addition to the *Analects*, Kongzi is traditionally credited with authoring, or at least editing, *The Five Classics*. These teachings were focused on two interrelated collections:

1. The Social Teachings discuss appropriate behavior for an individual in society, and in relation to one's fellow humans.
2. The Political Teachings address the design and function of government and the appropriate relationship of the ruler to the subject. Kongzi viewed education as the central vehicle by which to develop and ensure proper conduct within government administration specifically, and human society more generally.

Because of his contributions, he was known as "the teacher" in Asia, especially in Taiwan.

Kongzi's teaching on moral virtue, and the five duties of universal obligation, were ingrained in Chinese society. The five duties of obligation were between ruler and subject, parents and children, husband and wife, elder sibling and younger, and between friends. The moral qualities he particularly emphasized were wisdom, compassion, and courage.<sup>143</sup> Kongzi created a system of social and political philosophy which he passed on to his students through his teachings. They, in turn, collected his sayings and placed them in a book called *Lunyu*, meaning "collated conversations," now known in the West as the *Analects*. The twenty chapters in the *Analects* were grouped by non-related themes, but central ideas do recur across chapters, and sometimes appear in exactly the same wording or with slight variations.

Some of the basic *Rujia* teachings and practices include: Benevolence (*ren*)—compassion; Righteousness (*yi*)—moral values; Proper Rituals and Customs (*li*)—a system of rituals; Shrewdness (*zhi*)—knowing what is right and fair; and Integrity (*Xin*)—being trustworthy. These are accompanied by four virtues: loyalty, filial piety, chastity, and righteousness. Other elements about which Kongzi wrote include kindness and forgiveness, shame, bravery, respect, modesty, and the importance of self-effacement.

With these virtues in mind, Kongzi created the model of the gentleman (*junzi*), who is second only to the sages and kings. There are many characteristics of the *junzi*. He is a man who can stand poverty and suffering, do more and speak less, and who is disciplined, loyal, humble, and knowledgeable. Kongzi was considered by Chinese scholars to be the expert in traditions, as he claimed his

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<sup>143</sup> Novak, Phillip. *The World's Wisdom* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 126.

philosophical construct would bring back social order through rituals and obligations. He lived during the period when China was in political distress and considered the patterns of behavior for which he advocated to be a means of reconstructing a new ideal or utopia.

### ***Chinese History and Kongzi***

At least 1500 years before Kongzi was born, China had already developed a political structure and civilization. The rulers were sage-kings, and they brought inventions like farming and flood control to the areas along the Yellow River in ancient China. By the time Kongzi was born, China had an elaborate government structure, a sophisticated society, a vibrant culture, and a writing system. There were large market towns, and infrastructure such as bridges and irrigation systems with canal and dams. At that time, China is estimated to have had a population of about 50 million people. (In 2017, that number had grown to 1.31 billion.) Among the sage-kings, religious professionals, like shamans, performed religious ceremonies to honor ancestors, heal the sick with herbal medicine, foretell the future, and the like. Shamans at that time were mostly women, and they held official court positions.

It is important to understand that Kongzi was born at a troubled time of war and social upheaval, and a time of great poverty throughout most of China. These social and political circumstances inspired Kongzi's life and teachings. When his reputation grew, the ruler of his state asked him for advice. After Kongzi suggested that the ruler govern himself before governing others, he was

reassigned to an elevated post—but one that had no authority. Soon thereafter, Kongzi discovered the ruler's intent and resigned. After that, he traveled from town to town to promote his teachings about government and social reform. He had numerous students and followers, the most famous of which was Mencius. (Legend has it that Mencius, or Mengzi in Chinese, was the student of Kongzi's grandson.) Kongzi died in 479 BCE. As alluded to above, his students, and their students after them, collected Kongzi's teachings into what are now known as the *Analects*.

During the Han dynasty of 206 BCE to 220 BCE, China was stable and unified. Kongzi's teachings became famous, and he began to be seen as more than just an ordinary person with a preponderance of wise ideas. Some believed that he was elected by Heaven, which prompted fantastic stories about him; these included tales of his nobility, mystical powers, extraordinary appearance, and saintliness. As many Chinese scholars began to appreciate the *Analects* and the five duties of obligation, Kongzi became known as the "God of Culture." In time, government examinations were based on those teachings. During this period, stories of virtuous women and filial piety grew in popularity. The influence of Neo-Confucianism began.

### ***Neo-Confucianism and Women***

The term "Neo-Confucianism" (or LiXue in Chinese) was invented by missionaries to designate a form of Confucianism which was developed primarily

during the Song Dynasty (960–1280 BCE), and is considered to have been developed more fully during the Dynasty of Southern Song (1127–1279).

Neo-Confucians concluded Chinese society's integration of Kongzi's ideas by producing ritual handbooks. Thinkers like Zhu Xi wrote manuals for conducting funerals, ancestral worship, and weddings based on Kongzi's constructs. Confucian temples and commemorative arches for loyal widows and filial children were erected with the support of government and nobility. LiXue was the "study of principles," and since the Song Dynasty it has remained the blueprint of principles for the rest of Imperial China.<sup>144</sup>

Sadly, neo-Confucianism intensified the oppression of women, disallowing women to study and promoting loyalty and chastity as the highest of female virtues. As Lee Dian Rainey notes, "Chastity meant remaining a virgin before marriage, being faithful to one's husband during marriage, and remaining loyal to his memory and not remarrying after his death."<sup>145</sup> Men, however, were not subject to any of these rules. Male widowers were encouraged to remarry in order to carry on the family line, whereas female widows were not to remarry.<sup>146</sup>

From the Song Dynasty onward, women, especially upper-class women, were increasingly confined to the home. One of the main reasons for this was logistical: footbinding had been implemented. This practice is mentioned in historical records from the 1300s, but it could be older. Chinese historians suspect

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<sup>144</sup> "Neo-Confucianism," The East, last modified May 28, 2009, <http://www.theeast.org/neo-confucianism/>.

<sup>145</sup> Lee Dian Rainey, *Confucius and Confucianism: The Essentials* (West Sussex, UK: The Atrium, 2010), 170.

<sup>146</sup> Rainey, *Confucius Confucianism*, 171.

that it started among palace dancers, and then filtered down to families who desired to mimic the upper classes. By the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), footbinding was a widespread practice.<sup>147</sup> It became a status symbol for one's daughters to have bound-feet, and such women could be married off to better homes. The truth is that since they were so physically constrained by their bound feet, it was expected that they would be less likely to be promiscuous and unfaithful to their husbands. (Of course, nothing like this was imposed on the husbands.)

Throughout the *Analects*, there are plenty of passages that are oppressive and condescending toward women. Many Chinese male scholars do not touch on the problematic writings about women within Neo-Confucianism, as they claim that these may not have been the cause of the dramatic change in the status of women during the imperial period. Nonetheless, they acknowledge that Confucian teachings contribute to women's secondary status. Besides being inferior, all Chinese women are to express Confucian values by being loyal, serving their families, and maintaining their chastity. Today, many Chinese men and women no longer recognize that their culture, tradition, and values, including the discrimination against women, originate from Confucianism. Women condemn other women when they behave out of line with "tradition." In fact, this tradition keeps women from living up to their full potential for themselves and their societies.

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<sup>147</sup> Condon Lee, "The 'Golden Lotus': bound feet," Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences, Hong Kong Medical Journal 22, no.1, accessed June 2, 2017, <http://www.hkmj.org/system/files/hkmj-v22n1-hkmms.pdf>.

It is a reality that Chinese women are second-class family members. Misogyny runs deep in Asian societies. Baby girls were and are often abandoned or killed in the countryside of China and parents “wait” for a son. My paternal grandmother was born in China. Her parents decided to leave her in a nearby dumpster after her birth, as she was the third daughter born into the family. Her aunt retrieved and raised her until she was sixteen years old, at which point she married a stranger in a nearby village. Her mother-in-law gave her a new name since her father-in-law had already passed away. She was considered “useful,” and her mother-in-law welcomed her after she gave birth to a son—my father. My grandmother also held the same expectation of my mother.

Unfortunately, my mother only “produced” three daughters—and had to endure the shame of that for decades, even though she was educated and worked as a teacher. Despite a career with professional standing, her social status remained low simply because she had borne no sons. My grandmother loved us, but continued to impose these traditional values on me as I was growing up.

Like other son-preference cultures, this mindset is deeply rooted in China. Since ancient times, the bloodline of a family has passed through the male side only. Women are considered wasteful since they “marry out” and join their husband's families. For the same reason, the wives are to look after their in-laws, not their own parents. These thoughts originated with Confucius. He was clear that males are considered the official offspring and females are the subjects of their parents, husbands, and then son(s) as they age. In exchange, sons (together with their wives) are obliged to take care of their parents.



Even today, many Asians feel ashamed if they do not have a son. Thus, Confucius' influence on "filial piety" continues to impact Chinese society. Even though many Chinese try to be rational about the reality of son-preference, they remain beholden to that teaching. Confucius stated that there are three detriments in not honoring one's parents; among these, the failure to have offspring (by which he meant a son, as he did not consider a daughter to be offspring) was the most objectionable.

For centuries, China influenced many other Asian countries, including Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Those states also possess the son/male-preference culture. In Japan, females are openly discriminated against in school and the workplace. The sex trade in Asian countries is rampant, especially in third-world areas. Beyond financial compensation, sex workers think that women's sole purpose is to serve and satisfy men. Moreover, many Chinese and Asian wives try not to dwell on their husband's sexual misconduct due to their long history of oppression.

Despite Confucius' good intentions with regards to moral principles and duties, Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism have bound many Asian women with inherently limiting role obligations and duties. In the *Analects*, the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" were thought to comprise a cornerstone of the family structure and hence of societal stability. Consequently, Neo-Confucians advance the idea that a virtuous woman is to submit to the males in her family. Many Chinese women continue to live under this construct. Before marriage, fathers—and sometimes mothers, too—dictate the educational or career goals of a

daughter. They also have a say in whom she marries. Moreover, after she marries, a wife is to support and listen to her husband. She is expected to bear children, and, even if she has a career, she is also expected to take care of all household tasks. When a woman becomes a widow, she is to listen to her son.

Besides those virtues, wifely work means being a great domestic assistant and support. Neo-Confucianism emphasizes the traditional social division of labor. A wife is obligated to manage the home affairs, including cooking, house cleaning, looking after the family members (including in-laws), and being hospitable. And when a housewife deviates from these family duties, she is reputed to be a “lazy wife,” regardless of her reasons for ignoring social norms. Although thousands of years have passed since Confucius originally issued his advice, a Chinese woman continues to be judged according to her traditional performance as a wife and/or mother, instead of as a person in her own right. Much has changed in contemporary Chinese culture, but this concept remains embedded many Asian regions.

As a result, many Chinese immigrants and second- or third-generation Chinese Americans struggle with this construct, and their women continue to struggle under intentionally- or unintentionally-imposed gender role stereotypes and obligations. For centuries, women were judged by society or felt guilty about not getting married, not having children, being outspoken, being assertive, and/or not doing what their parents or in-laws desired. The saying, “A virtuous woman is one without talents” is still widely known today. Ironically, Kongzi’s intention was probably to set up a moral and societal structure which would meet the needs

of a specific time period, rather than to establish rules for all time. Regardless, such intentions and instructions clearly no longer benefit women or most children. As such, Asian American feminist theologians need to continue to bring attention to these issues.

In short, Asian women have suffered from marginalization and gender role stereotyping for centuries. Even if they are well-educated and have a good profession, liberation continues to be illusory. And although interpretations of Confucius' teaching vary from region to region, it has had a strongly negative impact on many Asian women's lives.

A large number of people, including women, neither recognize nor identify the gender discourse: they simply follow the "traditions" handed down to them from their elders. Growing up, children are taught, both at home and in school, that the "virtuous" ideal is for men to lead and women to follow. It seems almost impossible for Asian women to experience total transformation and liberation, as doing so continues to feel so "wrong." Asian women generally accept the fact that they are second-class citizens. And while many Asian postcolonial feminist theologians write about the oppression of women, they are silent about the "Confucius discourse," and the issues with it which I highlighted above. For these reasons I argue that feminists, especially from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan, should be critical of this ancient tradition. It is their moral obligation to re-examine the widespread damage done by its ethical and structural claims.

### ***Filial Piety, Women, and Family***

Filial piety (*xiao*) is one of the core foundations of Confucius' teachings. The role of the ideal gentlemen (*junzi*) is to be kind and proper, and to honor their parents at all costs. Confucius believed that his ideal family structure contributed to family stability. It ensures interdependence between children and their elders but, nevertheless, has also become an obligation in Chinese society.

Besides the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues," a Chinese wife is to have wifely (meaning gentle) speech, a wifely manner and appearance, and wifely work. Linguistic eloquence was never considered to be of particular merit in women, but there are no such restrictions placed upon men. To have a wifely manner and appearance, according to Confucian beliefs, is to pay little attention to one's appearance. A woman needs to be clean, neat, and average-looking. Many stories from old China praise a decent man for marrying an ugly but virtuous woman. However, many of these tales follow that guidance up with this advice (which is, of course, for men only): "Marry a virtuous woman as your wife but take a beautiful one as a concubine." Wifely work means being a great domestic assistant and support. Neo-Confucianism emphasizes this traditional social division of labor.

The challenges faced by nuclear Chinese families are real. Modernization has led to the breakdown of traditional families, in which three to four generations would cohabitate in one household. Typically in the US, after they marry, sons move in with their wives. Traditional Confucian parents continue to consider themselves part of their sons' nuclear families. They expect to be the baby sitters

for their grandchildren and continue to control the welfare of their sons' families. After marriage, women no longer visit their parents on holidays such as Chinese New Year, but visit them before or after, reserving the actual holiday for time with their husbands' parents or family. Though this family structure is well-defined and stable, it is nowhere close to being fair for every person, and simply reinforces the importance of having a son and the advantages of being born male.

### ***Guilt and Shame from Kongzi's Teaching***

#### *The Price of Being a Cultural Bridge for Children, and the Guilt and Shame of Raising "American Children"*

Parents who see and understand the damage and struggles caused by traditional culture are most likely to become a living bridge for their children, helping them transition into (and put down roots in) their new American home. However, it is common to see conflicts between those parents, and their own parents and in-laws, as they envision different futures for the next generations.

"Modern mothers" are usually pressured by the older generation to reinforce Chinese culture and teach Chinese language to their children. Relationships between in-laws are often strained. Daughters-in-law are disrespected and endure humiliating comments. At times—even in public or at family gatherings—they are "accused" of "forgetting their origins." A contemporary example is of a group of sixty young adults which, two decades ago, was told to leave a Chinese church because they asked for once-monthly English worship services. In the Chinese American community, the price of

advocating for and liberating children is high. It is little wonder that the shame and guilt of raising “American children” can be overwhelming for parents.

### *The Grief and Shame of Singleness and Childlessness*

The Chinese American community stigmatizes individuals, particularly females, who remain single. Such women are assumed to be ugly, flawed, mean, lacking in femininity, or high achievers (a detriment, as women are not to be in high positions). During weekly church gatherings, married couples sometimes remind and taunt single females about their singleness, whereas single men rarely provoke such critiques. Women are often offered unsolicited advice on how to find a husband. Moreover, sermons are typically based on/reference only traditional family values and constructs. In short, in traditional Chinese thinking, being single means missing out on life. The shame of singleness is intensified by the term, “old and lonely woman.”

Another stigma is childlessness. Although the intensity of this stigma has decreased in many Chinese communities across China, Chinese Americans continue to look down on married women without a child. The families who have only daughters face similar judgments. Again, the traditional Chinese saying holds true: “There are three ways to dishonor your elderly, and the greatest is not having a male offspring.”

Women divorcees face guilt and shame as they often being accused unfairly of not being able to “keep” their husband. They are assumed not to have been able to serve their husband well, or to keep them satisfied or happy.

### *The Lack of Voice and Identity Forming*

Kongzi's teachings affect all generations of Chinese. According to Erikson's Stages of Development Theory, identity formation is vital to adolescents. Parent-adolescent relationships influence identity styles in children. In their study, Shawn Matheis and Gerald Adams found that adolescents from interconnected families with close relationships tended to have normative identity styles, which assure a young person's emotional stability and well-being. "Adolescence is viewed both as a chronological period between puberty and early adulthood and as any time in the life cycle when an individual explores important life-alternatives with the aim of making commitments."<sup>148</sup>

At this stage of life, Chinese Americans and all adolescents develop their own identities by exploring different alternatives. Immigrant parents often lack understanding of this crucial process and create hardships which prevent their children from fully developing. The expectation of honoring one's parents is non-negotiable in most Chinese immigrant families. In addition, the expectation that Chinese daughters will be submissive further silences young Chinese American women. Many see submissiveness as a norm until they die.

Immigrant daughters, especially, are burdened with pressure, conformity, and expectations. They can seldom be themselves during this important period of development. The lack of normative identity formation is an epidemic crisis of transition for Chinese American children. Without appropriate opportunities to practice autonomy and decision-making during their teenage years, and without

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<sup>148</sup> Shawn Matheis and Gerald Adams, "Family Climate and Identity Style during Late Adolescence," *Journal of Identity* 4, no.1 (2004): 77-85, accessed April 12, 2017, [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S1532706XID0401\\_5](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S1532706XID0401_5).

an opportunity to have their own voice, they cannot form a healthy sense of self, and instead develop deep wounds.

### *Confucianism and Asian American Feminist Theology*

Can Confucianism come to terms with Asian American feminist theology? His teaching has a reputation for repression, bias, and role-stereotyping attitude toward women. Feminism has many forms, but its primary focus is to strive for gender equality. In my opinion, it does not necessarily mean that women and men are the same. It is about allowing each person to live up to their God-given potential. Gender role assignments, including complementarianism, often limit a person's autonomy. However, it is questionable if all marginalized women are victimized by men. Women also oppress women. Regardless, Confucianism contributed to the formation and perpetuation of oppressive social beliefs about, and distinctions between, Chinese women and men. Some degree of reconciliation may be possible, though, because Kongzi's original intention was to create harmony in relationships and the society. Similarly, one of the most important goals of Asian American feminist theology is to create harmony within families and communities. To do this, it advocates for the individual needs of women and young women within this group-oriented culture.

For Chinese American families in the US today to have harmony, perhaps we have to give children the freedom to adapt to the mainstream culture. Many Chinese immigrant parents are disappointed or feel abandoned by their children living a nuclear (rather than a traditional extended) family lifestyle. They are also



disappointed when their children do not go into the fields of medicine, dentistry, or pharmacy. Meanwhile, the children love their parents and also feel obligated to do as much as possible to please them, but in so doing, they must sacrifice their happiness on many occasions.

While the authority of Chinese immigrant families has lessened as a whole, some Chinese parents still insist on loyalty and obedience from their children and grandchildren. Immigrant children are often reminded of what their parents sacrificed in order for them to have a brighter future here in the US. Many adult children physically move far away from their traditional parents to draw a more definite boundary between them.

Asian American feminist theology needs to include and reflect the struggle of Confucian-bound Chinese women. Its role is to advocate for individual women, their families, and whatever else these women care about. The complexity of, and ambivalent relationship between, *Rujia* and women has to be the basis for theological reflection for several reasons. These include: 1) the need to unlink Chinese culture from Confucianism by presenting or reminding people about other ancient practices—for example, the natural flow of Taoism and compassion in Buddhism—which are just as much a part of Chinese culture as Confucianism is; 2) the need to point out the pros and cons of Westernization; 3) the need to de-emphasize self-discipline and increase awareness of the guidance of the Holy Spirit instead; 4) the need to restore Jesus as the center of Christianity, and focus on how He loved, healed, and challenged a distorted social construct; 5) the need to consider domestic and communal harmony the responsibility of every

individual, regardless of age, class, sexual orientation, religion, and the location of one's birth; 6) the need to emphasize that women are to free to flourish and be whomever God creates them to be; 7) the need to promote Asian American values in North America, including mutual respect, collaboration, and vitality for everyone; and 8) the need to advocate that society treat women not as men per se, but as individuals having their own power and uniqueness.

### **The Pros and Cons of Cultural Hybridity for Immigrant Children**

Cultural hybridity is another important topic in immigrant children's struggles. It refers to the merging of two or more different cultures through a period of contact and interaction. Homi Bhabha's book, *The Location of Culture*, presents his ideas about the hybridity of colonial identity and emphasizes that,

the discriminatory effects of the discourse of cultural colonialism, for instance, do not simply or singly refer to a 'person'... or to a discrimination between mother culture and alien culture...the reference of discrimination is always to a process of splitting as the condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different—a mutation.”<sup>149</sup>

Like mimicry, cultural hybridity opens up a space for the exchange of cultural and linguistic beliefs, products, and practices. Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry and hybridity underscores the reality that people may co-exist in at least two “spaces,” and hopes the effect of hybridity will diminish the visibility of colonial authority, or at least make it less visible. Bhabha sees hybridity as a strategy to reverse the domination process.

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<sup>149</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 285.

Hybridity reexamines the assumptions of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects in the narratives of cultural imperialism and centrism. Many scholars who focus their work on feminism and post-colonialism use Bhabha's ideas to understand and reconstruct the migrant culture and politics of the US. Hybridity accepts the merits of other ethnic groups and discards the shortcomings in their traditional behaviors. It aims to foster world peace through intercultural exchange and communication.

Other scholars, such as cultural theorist John Hutnyk, have criticized hybridity on the grounds that it is politically void. Hybridity may create a binary of “new identities,” which bind individuals to the “new ideal” and leave them without a culture. It also continues to display a judgmental “us-they” mindset. Identities which are out of the “new norm” can be destructive to truly authentic identity formation since they are imposed by prescription, rather than formed out of need and imagination. And there are further problems with hybridity. Who, for instance, decides what to keep and what to discard? Who maintains control over the “either-or” narrative? And how will hybridity resolve intergenerational tensions?

In fact, cultural hybridization is inevitable as the interactions of people with “others” increase due to new technologies, the realities of mass communication, and various forms of what might be called “invasion.” Almost every element of culture is hybridized with elements of some other culture. Thus, Chinese feminist theological reflections do not necessarily need to return to some elusive “pure” culture, much less adopt other cultures for the sake of identity. For

many Chinese immigrant children live in a cross-cultural environment; their voiceless grief at being labeled both “not Chinese enough” and “too American” is apparent. They are pulled in both directions. How can spiritual leaders relate to such bi-directional pull when ministering to the younger generations? Certainly, we can be careful not to create an ideal for others, and instead encourage a future with imagination—a future of learning and finding common fluidity and ground through love.

### **The Necessity of Adventist Women’s Liberation, Headship, and Authority**

The combination of oppression, cultural burdens, liminal living, guilt, and shame plague first- and second-generation Chinese American Women within the Seventh-day Adventist community. Such women are in desperate need of healing. Moreover, these healing needs to come from other women—and specifically from women like them. In the past, it was foreign/Western missionaries who introduced Christianity to Asia, often alongside colonial conditioning. That version of Christianity was mostly by and for men. Consequently, Asian and Chinese American women do not possess a true and full awareness of what liberation in Christ can look like for them. Many consider their struggles within and outside of their own culture and religion to be normative. They have abandoned their native religious beliefs and adopted a hierarchal and patriarchal construct which stifles them, and any motivation they may have to change and be liberated—if they even have any awareness that this is possible.

Many younger immigrant Adventist women are struggling to find their identity during their transition into Euro-American culture, yet they cannot find support for their emotional and spiritual needs. As such, those needs and wounds fester and form scars. Traditional SDA spiritual practices are limited in their ability to heal, as they typically focus on adhering to denominational doctrines and cultures. Moreover, women's headship and authority continue to be an controversial issue within the denomination. Why is this? And what can such women do about such marginalization and lack of authority?

***The Marginalization of Women in Christian Theological Reflections, Religious Constructs, Adventism, Headship, and Authority***

One of the main challenges for Chinese Christian churches is the discourse about women in leadership. Christian churches, perhaps particularly those in the Asian community, find it difficult to engage women in leadership for several reasons. The first is the patriarchal impact of the Bible. The Bible undoubtedly describes a patriarchal culture. Male names are recorded much more frequently than female ones. Most of the cleanliness rituals in the Hebrew Bible are targeted at women. The ideal patriarchy of Abraham created a precedent for Judeo-Christian social patterning, with each tribe, clan, and family headed by a male father-figure.<sup>150</sup> The ideal patriarchy of Abraham created a precedent for Judeo-Christian social patterning, with each tribe, clan, and family headed by a male father-figure.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 94.

<sup>151</sup> Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 95.

In *Sexism and God-Talk*, Rosemary Radford Ruether states that “the pattern of patriarchal anthropology can be illustrated in the entire line of classical Christian theology from ancient to modern times.”<sup>152</sup> Similarly, Howard Rhys writes,

The Gospels and Epistles not only reflect the attitudes of these earlier Scriptures, citing them on occasion as valid authorities, but also manifest the cultural attitudes of the Mediterranean world in which they were composed. In short, the Bible and the “authorities”, from the point of view of the West, are the product of a man’s world from Genesis to Revelation. As the missionaries introduced the good news to the Asian countries, they reinforced the existing misogynistic structure. Women continued to be suppressed. The male-preference construct was reinforced.<sup>153</sup>

Yet the Bible contains other, more liberatory, themes as well. As Ruether notes, the “Patriarchal Christianity that came to dominate the Christian Church in classical orthodoxy never went so far as to deny women’s participation in the image of God completely.”<sup>154</sup>

The second challenge stems from traditional expectations about women’s proper place in the church and family. The roles of women in Christianity can vary substantially today—just as they have varied historically since the first century New Testament church. Nevertheless, many leadership roles in organized faith communities are still restricted to males. In the (official) Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, only men are expected and allowed to serve as priests or deacons, and only males serve in senior leadership positions such as the pope,

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<sup>152</sup> Ruether, *Sexism God-Talk*, 95.

<sup>153</sup> Howard Rhys, “Patriarchal Culture in the Bible and History,” *Women Priest*, accessed January 10, 2016, <http://www.womenpriests.org/related/rhys.asp>.

<sup>154</sup> Ruether, *Sexism God-Talk*, 95.

patriarch, and bishop.<sup>155</sup> Similarly, many Asian American churches are extremely traditional. Women members, not to mention men, are uncomfortable seeing a female preaching from the pulpit. Women may serve as deaconesses or leaders of the children's sections. Although many Christian communities are beginning to ordain women as ministers, some other groups—including the Seventh-day Adventists—are reacting by tightening their rules about women's ecclesial authority.

The role of women in leadership, especially ordination, is still too radical for various Adventist Asian communities. Both the New Testament and traditional Adventist theological notions have contributed to beliefs about the appropriate roles for Christian women. Using Scriptural proof texts to support their arguments, many Adventist churches preach that women are to serve in roles supportive and subordinate to men: "Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty".<sup>156</sup> Ryhs also quotes, "The rule remains with the husband, and the wife is compelled to obey him by God's command. He rules the home and the state, wages wars, and defends his possessions. The woman, on the other hands, is like a nail driven into the wall. She sits at home. She does not go beyond her most personal duties."<sup>157</sup>

The third challenge arises out of unsolvable difference of opinion.

Regardless of whether women's marginalization is valid in the eyes of the church,

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<sup>155</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether. "Historical Development of Feminist Theologies in the Christian Tradition." (lecture, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, September 9, 2015).

<sup>156</sup> 1 Timothy 2:15( NRSV).

<sup>157</sup> Ruether, "Historical Development Feminist Theologies."

questions are being raised within the Adventist community about the sharp role distinction between men and women. “Is it evident within the Bible an expression of a divine order, and so of permanent theological significance, or is it the accidental consequence of a human social order that has now become outmoded?”<sup>158</sup> If we accept the first alternative, the exclusion of women from leadership is set and closed permanently for reconsideration. But if we adopt the second explanation, there can no longer be any theological reason to bar women from leadership.<sup>159</sup>

On this point, it is useful to recall that Ellen G. White, the female co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was herself an ordained minister. Consequently, many Adventists are perplexed about the recent direction of women’s leadership within the denomination. Important works have been done, and progress has been made, by many Adventist scholars and theologians on the matter of women’s leadership. There has also been progress in recognizing the importance of female leadership in China, where 90 percent of Chinese Adventist churches are led by women pastors.

#### *The Stance of Women in Leadership within the Adventist Community*

According to the online version of the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook, women are still incredibly uncommon in Adventist leadership. Out of

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<sup>158</sup> Ryhs, “Patriarchal Culture Bible History”

<sup>159</sup> Ryhs, “Patriarchal Culture Bible History.”



approximately 221 total leadership positions, nine seats (4%) belong to women.<sup>160</sup>

Also, only one of the 850 conferences and missions worldwide is led by a woman president. At the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in July 2015, representatives voted to disallow the church's thirteen divisions from making provisions to ordain women within their territories. Nonetheless, a diversity of practices persists. Some European and North American divisions of the SDA church continue to ordain female pastors. Sadly, almost none of the Chinese Adventist churches in the US consider the issue of women in leadership.

Jared Wright, the managing editor of *Spectrum Magazine* (an independent Adventist journal), published an article entitled "Women in Top Positions of Adventist Leadership Remain Extremely Rare." There he notes that,

Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church's official administrative structure, women in top leadership positions are extremely rare, even given a generous definition of "top leadership positions." The Seventh-day Adventist Church has ensured through its stance on women's ordination that female leaders in the church will serve, by-and-large, in subordination to male leaders.<sup>161</sup>

Many male pastors regret how the church has devalued women. In "I'm Sorry for How the Church has Sidelined Women," Marc Alan Schelske reminds us that,

the early Christian church was predominantly a community of the underclasses. It was composed of women, slaves, and children, nearly all of them poor. These people, who had little voice in their world, saw hope in a Savior who was excluded by the religious institution and executed by the occupying military authority. Even

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<sup>160</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook 2017," accessed October 30, 2017, <http://www.adventistyearbook.org/default.aspx?>.

<sup>161</sup> Jared Wright, "Women in Top Positions of Adventist Leadership Remain Extremely Rare," *Spectrum Magazine*, Last modified March 8 2016, <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/2016/03/08/women-top-positions-adventist-leadership-remain-extremely-rare>.

the Adventist church, unable to come to resolution on the question of women in ministry, was founded by a woman!<sup>162</sup>

Despite the women's ordination movement in North America, Asian Americans have not been represented on any Adventist panel discussions or articles regarding women's leadership. SDA women with leadership gifts are being systematically denied the ability to bring their full God-given selves to the table. This lack of interest in women's full range of experiences and talents is hurting the younger generations, who are growing up in a society that increasingly welcomes women into leadership positions while their church vehemently continues to forbid it.<sup>163</sup>

Truly liberated human lives will not be possible for women until oppression, exploitation, and cruelty are recognized as weaknesses in their faith communities and societies. Such recognition requires identifying their exclusion as a failure, cultivating certain instinctive moral sensibilities, and engaging in interpersonal relationships. The liberation I imagine is an all-inclusive and non-judgmental display of harmonious humanity. Such peace can transform competitiveness, aggression, and domination. It is also the true desire of many Chinese American women. The following narrative displays the journey of my healing and liberation.

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<sup>162</sup> Marc Alan Schelske, "I'm Sorry for How the Church has Sidelined Women," Spectrum Magazine, last modified May 13, 2017, <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/2017/05/13/im-sorry-how-church-has-sidelined-women>.

<sup>163</sup> Schelske, "I'm Sorry How Church Sidelined."

### **A Personal Narrative**

I was the first-born child of my parents. Inevitably, they were hoping that I would be a boy. However, being the firstborn has its advantages, even though I felt pressure to lead and care for my younger siblings while we were growing up. My mother felt pressured into having a son as she knew the importance of continuing the Heun family. Her mother's firstborn was a boy. But each time she tried to have another son she ended up with a daughter—seven of them! My uncle was my grandmother's favorite child. Like her mother, my mother did not want to live with the shame and grief of not having birthed a boy. For decades, my mother could not face her mother-in-law's disappointment and shaming for this "failure."

Growing up, my parents expected me to care for my two younger sisters, and I was responsible for all their actions. I always protested this responsibility, but was reminded that the Chinese tradition is for the oldest to take charge. Besides my sisters, I was also "in charge" of my eleven younger cousins during our weekly family gatherings back when I was barely a teenager.

I hated being the oldest and resented being a leader against my will. Whenever I tried to take care of myself and meet my own needs, I was told that I was being selfish. I longed for love, but love for others was demanded from me instead.

When I turned eight or nine years old, I had already realized my role as a big sister and the oldest child in the family. By the time I was thirteen, my "self" was forgotten. I became very much attuned to others' feelings. I also became an

expert in anticipating others' needs. Looking back, I realize I lost my identity because it was neither valued nor nurtured.

At school, Confucian philosophy reaffirmed the caretaking role that I had been assigned, as well as the need for me to be submissive in order to preserve an ostensibly higher harmony. At church, the self-sacrificial model of Jesus Christ reconfirmed that I did not need autonomy. The rules for biblical women also plagued me. As a teenager, I sensed that I was “trapped” in the “system” but could not articulate my pain. I had given up voicing my opinions and preferences. Some of my high school classmates were in even more oppressive situations than me. Most of us thought that it was normal not to have an opinion about anything. We would hang out and distract ourselves with outings like barbeques and hikes. We tried to laugh off our stress whenever we could.

My parents brought me up in a traditional Seventh-day Adventist home in Hong Kong. The church had provided job opportunities for both of them. Our living conditions improved significantly once they started working as teachers. We lived on an Adventist college campus with the kindest missionaries from the United States. One of the missionary kids and I became good friends. My spoken English improved greatly because of them. God was introduced to me as far back as I can remember. I always felt connected to God through nature (e.g. flowers, seeds, leaves, and clouds in the sky). I loved attending church and could not wait to be baptized. I prayed to God often, and I trusted God. My faith, as a child, was simple and beautiful.

Strong Adventist traditions were reinforced on that college campus. My mother required that we conform in public, but inside our home, religious rules were more relaxed and reasonable. Since then I have learned how to live a double life. At fifteen, I joined my grandmother, my two sisters, and a cousin in attending a baptismal class. The pastor was dynamic and convincing. He proved to me, through both the Scriptures and his own theological interpretations, that Adventists are the “chosen” ones, and thus superior to any other Christian community. I felt privileged to be invited to this exclusive, divine family and was determined to act accordingly. Questions were discouraged during the baptismal classes. That wasn’t a problem for me, since I had long ago given up having my own thoughts and feelings.

I began to cling to my faith community for hope, identity, and security. Paradoxically, that caused me to wander away from God. I slowly transferred my trust and identity to my church and relied on it exclusively for my spiritual growth. I then no longer felt connected with God, and shortly thereafter I found religion meaningless. I began to “do my own thing” and cared little for Adventism. However, I continued to help out in my faith community and feel superior to others because of my affiliation with the church. By my early twenties, faith had become a habit and an obligation.

I spent my childhood and teenage years in Hong Kong. The city was at its best from the 1970s through the 1990s. Since my parents worked for the church, they were pressured to enroll their children in our church school. Still, my mother insisted on sending us to the better government schools, for which I remain

grateful. Through these institutions, I was exposed to excellent education and learned good study habits. My organizational skills were formed during my high school years. I made many friends who let me be myself. I was the happiest when I was among my classmates. I still keep in touch with many of them.

Like a lot of Hong Kongers, my experience of British colonialism happened to be very pleasant. We were delighted to be under British control, and we felt free and respected. Hong Kong was financially prosperous and yet Chinese culture was preserved. Hong Kongers, especially during the seventies and eighties, felt lucky as we witnessed the horrors of the Cultural Revolution taking place in China. Our relatives in Mainland China lived very different lives, lives of poverty and fear. It is sad to think that, as a Chinese, I would rather align myself with the foreign (British) occupant. Regardless, my mother was worried about us staying in Hong Kong after 1997—at which point Hong Kong was returned to China—so my parents decided to leave our beloved home country and we immigrated to California when I was twenty years old. My mother's sisters were already US citizens and one of them graciously agreed to be our sponsors. Leaving my friends and my paternal grandmother was unbearable, for I had grown up with her, and we were very close.

I loved Hong Kong and its vibrant, diverse culture. I was allowed to be Chinese and free simultaneously, a state for which the Mainland Chinese longed. The British were not at all oppressive to the people of Hong Kong. As I recall, there were Chinese from China coming to Hong Kong through various methods daily. Many got caught and even died along the way.

I often described my migration to the United States as an “exile.”

Although I have returned to Hong Kong many times since then, I know that as long as Hong Kong is under the rule of Communist China, I will only be a visitor there.

I was twenty years old when I first came to the United States. My parents relied heavily on me for decision-making, translation, transportation, and some financial support. I had to fight hard to attend college instead of working. They also dictated my degree major and my social life. It was not easy. I remember one night I was crying in my car, asking God to help me as I fell into deep despair. I felt alone and had hit rock bottom. I missed my grandmother and my friends.

A few months later, God guided me to a group of young adults in a Chinese Adventist church. I enjoyed all their activities and became quite active in that congregation. I also began to feel liberated as I was encouraged to ask questions, although looking back, that community was still quite conservative. Nonetheless, I appreciated their caring attitude.

I met my husband and started to date him around the same time that I joined the young adult group. We shared with each other about our views on religion and God. My mother disapproved of my relationship with my then-boyfriend and now-husband, and for five years gave me a hard time about it. I did not realize that I had the right to make my own decisions but continued to seek approval from my family and others.

All things considered, the transition to the US was quite smooth, but it was still difficult at home for me. I fit quite well into the American culture and

enjoyed the chance to be autonomous when I was not at home. But at home my parents, usually my mother, insisted on keeping some of the Chinese culture, especially the tradition of leaving any decision-making to the parents. Conflicts with my mother were frequent. I now appreciate her caring heart but we both were in pain. It was incredibly exhausting to navigate both worlds, and I again eventually lost my sense of self.

After I was married, I relied heavily on my husband to fight my battles. As I had been brought up to do, I transferred my submissiveness from my parents to my husband and his parents, and continued to be voiceless. My in-laws liked the submissive version of me. Back then, my goal was to make everyone else happy. Pain and hurt I buried deep inside myself, locked up in the darkest place.

Before my son was born, I sought counseling from a Marriage and Family Therapist. During that year, she taught me to “mourn” the desire for the ideal mother that I never had and showed me how to handle my disappointments in life. Those tasks were not easy, but I embraced the challenge. The most important advice she gave me was to continue to be vulnerable in life. Largely, I learned to do so—but there were some people in whose company I kept my guard up, and I also remained resentful and bitter toward my religion for over two decades. That year of therapy only touched the tip of the iceberg of my need for healing.

Four years after my daughter (my second child) was born, I felt the call to become a chaplain. It came when I was searching for a Marriage and Family Therapy program around where I live. That night I felt God asking me, “How



about being a chaplain?” At that time, although I had heard the call quite distinctly, I went and asked my husband for confirmation.

Two months later, I was in my first class of the Chaplaincy program, Old Testament Thought. I loved every class I took in the program. Each course pushed me to step outside my comfort zone. I began to expand my view of God and felt very badly about how I used to think that I was a superior Christian, and that our denomination was better than other Christian faith communities.

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) further challenged me to let go of what I had learned from my religious community and to explore past the boundaries created by official versions of faith and organized rituals. During my third unit of CPE, I prayed to God for an answer to my nagging question: “If Christianity is the true religion, why are there many good non-Christians?” One day in my backyard, God answered, “People are like mirrors. You all reflect My wisdom and love. My light is given to all. Whoever polishes their mirrors will reflect brightly. Do not underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit.”

From the four units of CPE, I learned the meaning behind Roman Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, and other rituals. I enjoyed making friends with people from all walks of life. God taught me to let go of control and rely on God. I also discovered that self-discipline leads to legalism, burnout, and feelings of insecurity about our salvation. True discipline, led by the Holy Spirit, brings true faith, which stems from feeling loved and having a heart filled with gratitude. That faith—that Holy Spirit-led discipline—leads to freedom in Jesus Christ. That freedom made me unstoppable in my search to know God.

I began my doctoral studies at Claremont School of Theology (CST) in the fall of 2014, two years after I began working as a chaplain. Before attending classes at CST, I expected to free myself from my faith community. I also expected to learn to “win arguments” with members of my church. What I have learned instead is, 1) not to change what already exists, but instead to enhance it; and 2) to always consider and include others’ points of view, especially those perspectives communicated by individuals without a strong voice. Most significantly, my professors did not prescribe ways to approach and understand religion, but rather facilitated my own communion with God.

My most profound healing came from spiritual activities like prayer, reflection, Compassion Practice, and the use of the Internal Family System approach. The first semester at CST, in Dr. Andrew Dreitcer’s Spiritualities course, I learned the most valuable insight of my time in graduate school: that—although religious systems may be ineffective—it is unnecessary to deconstruct or dismiss them. To the contrary, it is far better to enhance them by navigating them with compassion and love. I also attended Dr. Frank Rogers’ Teaching Compassion Practice course. One evening, as I walked into a class held in the chapel, I saw lit candles all around the labyrinth. I had the feeling that God had prepared and was waiting to meet me. During my first labyrinth walk, I felt a brief hug from God during the second half. My reaction was, “That was it!?” I wished the feeling could be longer. God also impressed upon me, “It’s time to heal.”

In the spring of 2015, I enrolled in Dr. Frank Rogers’ Radical Compassion course. I had learned the essence of divine healing and was prompted to continue

my journey of healing. I had closed my heart to a few individuals around whom I felt unsafe. Although I had made much progress over the previous decade or so, I was brought to a different level of healing through Dr. Rogers' class. All the exercises from the course were beneficial to me in understanding and practicing compassion. The first part of the course taught me how important it is to love myself. I have come to understand the incredible and real experience of self-compassion.

I also compare my prayer life to being a student in class. I come to God in prayer. I was taught to say my prayers. But how can I be a virtuous disciple when it is mainly I who am doing the talking? How can I grow as a disciple of Christ when I am afraid of open communication? When students sit in class, they are not the ones who set the agenda: the teacher is. There are times when students are invited to talk and to have a dialogue with the teacher; but their primary task is to listen. Students learn by being quiet, being attentive, curious, and by listening.

The classroom becomes distracting when others are making noises. Therefore, silence is important for concentration and listening. And how do the students know that they are listening to their teacher and not an imposter? Jesus says, "My sheep know my voice." The key to discipleship is to get to know our shepherd's voice. It does not mean I have to be perfect or flawless, but I have to spend time with my guide.

There are many ways to pray reflectively. One of my favorites is to read a passage of Scripture, pause, and listen for God's personal word for me. I sit in

silence, allowing my heart to be drawn back to God's will and gifts. I often come into prayer with a focus on God, letting God set the agenda.

Prayer walks have also become a favorite way of mine to connect with God. For a few months in 2016, I kept asking God to be with me because I was struggling with frequent marginalization by two male spiritual leaders. God answered during one of my prayer walks, "When you are with me, you are in paradise, and nothing else matters. Look for me in not-so-obvious places. Also, you can always find me in children." I felt loved and relieved. During that time, I was a chaplain to a neo-natal intensive unit. Caring for the weakest help me to feel God's gentle but strong power.

The Internal Family System course has contributed to my healing as well. With the help of Jay Earley's book, *Self Therapy*, I have befriended my inner parts, shown compassion to my wounds, and become grounded in my authentic self. I discovered that my parts were trying to protect the "little girl" in me, who was fragile. I was scared and humiliated, and I longed to be valued. As I began to understand the motives of my protectors, I was able to enter into the healing process far more deeply. I no longer rely on anyone to feel secure. I am confident knowing that I am here for myself, with the help of God. Understanding and being kind to myself makes a big difference for me. Compassion towards self and others brings forth freedom and joy in my life. It gives me courage and clarity to face and call out injustice. I am now willing to share my experience with other Chinese women if it can help them in their journeys as well.

Over the past two years, I have noticed a change in my motivations to advocate for myself and others. In the past, it was my “protector” who did the defending, but now it is my innermost being. I find that I do not fret so much about life’s twists and turns since I let God—rather than my parts—guide my actions and reactions. I am present and centered in my core most of the time. I have more clarity in my daily life. In reading Frank Rogers’ *Practicing Compassion*, I find freedom and restoration. I then also see myself filled with energy to care for others, an energy that flows from my heart.

During my coursework, my academic advisor, Dr. Dreitcer, inspired me to pursue the spiritual path of compassion by teaching me about spiritualities across religious histories and traditions. I find that it is essential to spend time being grounded in God’s compassion several times a day. This is a significant portion of my prayer life now.

As a fellow traveler, I will continue to take time to show love to myself. I have noticed that I am becoming more resilient. After exploring self-compassion through letter writing from Kristin Neff’s book, *Self-Compassion*, during the spring quarter of 2015, I got a “letter” from God. It said, “Dear Angela, I love to spend time with you. You are sweet and considerate. Thank you for loving Me and standing up for others at all costs. I will make it up to you. I am with you! I will help you with your weaknesses and make you strong. Love, God.”

After working as a board-certified healthcare chaplain for five years, I was invited to join the faculty of the School of Religion at Loma Linda University in March 2017 as a program director for the MS Chaplaincy program. For the past

five years, my spiritual journey has not been smooth. I was feeling bitter towards the pastor who taught me in the baptismal studies program decades ago.

Encountering his extremely conservative version of Adventism during my formative years affected my relationship with God for a long time. I used to get very emotional each time I had a chance to share my experience with others. Two years ago, I finally forgave him and the theology he represented. I found healing and it was a freedom that I had never before experienced.

There were also many incidents where I felt marginalized by male spiritual leaders, due to their patriarchal mindsets. Tears often accompanied my disappointment, hurt, and pain. It was during those moments that I pressed forward to learn to love myself and others. Many times, I asked God, “Why do I have to go through this?” “How do you want me to handle this?” The answer was and is always, “with patience, kindness, and compassion.”

As I began to heal, I have clarity. My authentic self leads me to dig deep and rediscover what my mother instilled in me when I was little—to be understanding and have compassion.

Writing this narrative helps me to realize I was “pinned” under a rock placed by others in the name of “religion.” This rock had stunned my spiritual progress. As I asked God to shine a healing light to the wounded me, I felt relieved. With this freedom, I look forward to more growth.

It is through healing that I can reactivate the divine gifts in me as I have become comfortable in being uncomfortable with social and religious injustice, and am open to spiritual practices which enhance my walk with the Sacred.

Another day while I was walking and praying, the Wisest said, “Many followed me but with many different kinds of motives. If you follow me only for blessings, you will be disappointed. How do I treat people who were against me? And how do you treat people who are against you? If you are only nice to the people who treat you nicely, what does that mean to me? The measure of being a follower of mine is how you treat people you dislike or who are unkind to you.”

As I encounter others in all walks of life—those within, in other, or without faith communities—my passion pushes me to continuously engage, imagine, create, advocate, liberate, and transform through spiritual practices which will meet their needs, not mine.

For the past two years, I have had conversations with Adventist Chinese American women, aged 16 to 55 years, who approached me to voice their struggles, frustrations, and sadness about feeling trapped in the Chinese culture and the conservative view of Adventism. I see a need to develop spiritual practices for this population so that they can be healed from their past wounds. As womanist Delores Williams suggests, to bring wholeness is to “search for the voices, actions, opinions, experience, and faith.”<sup>164</sup>

My life journey enables me to identify with other Chinese Adventist women who need healing and liberation as they struggle with and within Confucianism and the patriarchal constructs of Christianity. I began to feel hopeful seeing progressive women’s groups emerge in Taiwan and Hong Kong. The Chinese theologian Kwok Pui-lan has written significantly on the topics of

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<sup>164</sup> Williams, *Sisters Wilderness*, 115.

postcolonial and Asian feminist theologies. Adventist Chinese American women need these and many other resources to heal from the wounds inflicted by their own family, society and faith community.

However, most Chinese American Adventist women are still voiceless in their hurt and pain because they sacrifice their dignity to keep the peace, just as they have been taught to do. Deep down they are bitter and angry and they long to be released from guilt and shame. Young Chinese Adventists are not being heard even though they are crying loudly for love, acceptance, and liberation.

How can Chinese American Adventist churches help such women? They can help by desiring and working towards a wholeness approach for their community—to create a healthy and just world, to reexamine traditions, and to bring healing, compassion, liberation, dignity, and voice to Chinese American Adventist women.



## CHAPTER SIX

### SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR HEALING AND FLOURISHING

This chapter presents various spiritual practices which SDA Chinese American women can use to enrich their religious lives and describes how those practices might facilitate healing. They include but not limited to the Compassion Practice, Internal Family System model, and various way of prayer. As the need for healing becomes more prevalent in this community, so too does the need for their churches to provide transformative tools for women members. Traditionally, Chinese ethnic and religious cultures have not given young women permission to trust their own reality for they are to be guided by others and traditions. Many young women grew up unaware that their mothers were locked up inside, unable to be free of themselves. They suffer without knowing the causes of their suffering. Likewise, some of these older women intuited that there is a more fulfilling way to live, but thought that the risk was too high. They continue to accept their condition not knowing other options.

This inability to engage the “real self” means that the outer appearance and behavior of many Adventist Chinese American women does not reflect their inner turmoil, fragility, and sadness. Based off my work as a spiritual leader, I believe this phenomenon is almost ubiquitous among the middle class. Many middle-class Chinese immigrant families present a pristine appearance no matter how their inner worlds might be functioning or not functioning. Chinese middle-class women’s outer appearance is consistent: they are well-dressed, smiling, in-

control, and polite. Yet many of them are also emotionally fragile. At times, this state of being pushes them towards extreme competition in all areas of life—especially with others’ children.

Most immigrant parents are exceedingly responsible, and try to provide the “best” for their children. Nevertheless, their own inner wounds prevent them from giving their best emotionally and/or perhaps more importantly preventing their children to be who they have aspired to be. The more they feel threatened by their children’s autonomy, in this country where autonomy is so highly prized, the more they tell their children that there is only one way to be—and that is not the way of their adopted homeland. Furthermore, they taught their children to have a “right” relationship with God, but they were not given the tools to attain such a relationship. This continues to lead to emotional chaos.

What causes them to be like this? The Chinese American Adventist women who attend Chinese churches tend to remain theologically conservative. They are sincere, and often motivated by obligation, shame, and fear: the obligation to repay God’s kindness and their parents’ sacrifices, the shame of being a sinner and of wanting to adopt US patterns of being, and the fear of losing their salvation and not making their family proud. With this background, spiritual freedom is low on their list of priorities. Subconsciously, immigrant mothers tend to be rigid in using religion to get their “Americanized” children under control.

Both generations need the love of Jesus to heal their many hurts, including hurts from early childhood. Divine power can heal their wounds, and restore them so that they may become the persons whom God created and gifted them to be—

women who can trust God and themselves. To this end, the following chapter offers a series of practices which, when followed, may result in such individuals' emotional and spiritual healing.

### **Liberation and Emotional Healing through Compassion Practice**

As love and compassion are the hope for humanity, the Compassion Practice is an important means of showing love and empathy. This practice allows individuals to coming into the presence of the sacred, experience divine compassion, and embodying a new life. Various faith traditions practice compassion in order to tend to the hurting world. In Christianity, Jesus is the center and the provider of compassion. Moreover, the Christian Bible is saturated with examples of compassion. From its very first pages, the Hebrew Bible describes a God who has compassion for Israel. This compassion pervades the Gospels, and presents itself as a challenge to followers, and is exemplified in Jesus—a Savior who suffers for the world, and who asks his followers to live and act compassionately.

Frank Rogers, co-director of the Center for Engaged Compassion and a professor at Claremont School of Theology, likewise teaches the practice of compassion. He describes compassion as “the bond of human connection,” and suggests a primary purpose of the compassion practice in all communities is to open hearts to understanding, healing, and the showing of empathy towards self, others, and the world.<sup>165</sup> Roger’s compassion practice increases one’s capacity to care. On a personal level, harboring negative feelings towards the self and others

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<sup>165</sup> Frank Rogers, *Practicing Compassion* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2015).

can make compassion challenging to achieve. These feelings, and others which arise out of emotional wounds and personal pain, are actually symptoms that indicate the need to have compassion for oneself first, before caring for others. The intent is to receive healing and extend compassion to self and others.

Forgiveness and healing go hand in hand. In his book, *Practicing Compassion*, Rogers also wrote about showing compassion towards difficult others. It is a process with an understanding that begins with self. In the Chinese American Adventist community, dealing with and forgiving offenses or hurts is interpreted as a given of being a Christian. It is common to apply Jesus' answer to Peter's forgiveness question during mediation and counseling sessions. Similarly, in Confucianism, forgiveness is about following a moral obligation. In short, it may be a foreign idea to many Chinese Adventists that a personal healing journey begins with self and goes beyond offering forgiveness to others. According to Rogers, offenders can also be a mirror or a spiritual teacher for the practitioner: they can learn much about themselves from the reaction of repelling others.

Chinese American women often feel the hurt of inequality and marginalization; almost equally as often, they are told to keep their hurts quiet. They may accumulate negative feeling toward others, but they believe that it is a virtue to suffer in silence. Consequently, they are exposed to challenges such as self-doubt, low self-esteem, shame, guilt, and anxiety, and are over-burdened with roles and responsibilities. Beyond leading to healing, the practice of compassion invites them to be liberated and connected with the compassionate core instilled in them by God.

Rogers created the following model and description for practicing compassion:

1. Getting Grounded: The goal in this phase is to create time and space to pause and center oneself. Sitting on a chair with legs touching the ground, and/or sitting or lying on the floor and taking deep breaths are essential to beginning the practice
2. Enacting “PULSE.”<sup>166</sup> Rogers uses the acronym PULSE to describe the second phase:

“P” stands for “paying attention.”<sup>167</sup> According to Rogers, people are conditioned by their own experiences and perspectives to relate to each other through judgments and reactions. He proposes instead that individuals be seen for who they really are, as beings with depth and uniqueness, as opposed to how others want them to be. Chinese immigrant daughters, as well as all other human beings, know this “difference between being seen and being objectified. Compassion engenders the sense of truly being seen without the distortional filter of another’s judgments or agenda”<sup>168</sup>

“U” stands for “Understanding empathetically.”<sup>169</sup> God’s compassion leads humanity to be moved by others’ experiences. On many occasions, Jesus was moved by others’ pain and suffering. Rogers observes that “a

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<sup>166</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 27.

<sup>167</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 27.

<sup>168</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 24.

<sup>169</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 27.

compassionate person understands, in his or her depth, the wounds, heartaches, and longings at the core of another person's behavior and experience."<sup>170</sup>

"L" stands for "Loving with connection."<sup>171</sup> At the core of a compassionate self is what the Scriptures describe as agape love. It is an unconditional, all-embracing love.<sup>172</sup>

"S" stands for "Sensing the Sacred."<sup>173</sup> When individuals are open to and moved by other's suffering, the Holy Spirit leads them to deepen their care out of love for self and others. The heart of an ever-expanding compassionate self can hold and heal all wounds.<sup>174</sup>

"E" stands for "Embodying new life."<sup>175</sup> Compassion yearns for the transformation of self and others. It goes beyond loving self, taking delight in witnessing others' freedom, liberation, and flourishing.

3. Pursuing "FLAG."<sup>176</sup> Rogers uses the acronym FLAG to describe the third phase, which seeks to understand the reason behind another's distress. This helps to cultivate compassion, which in turn can heal all wounds and restore lives.

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<sup>170</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 24.

<sup>171</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 27.

<sup>172</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 25.

<sup>173</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 27.

<sup>174</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 25.

<sup>175</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 27.

<sup>176</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 71.

- a. “F” stands for “Fear.”<sup>177</sup> When immediate threats such as rejection, attack, and abandonment are detected, fear is a movement to protect the self.<sup>178</sup>
- b. “L” stands for “Longing.”<sup>179</sup> It is the movement which desires flourishing—freedom, love, and liberation.<sup>180</sup>
- c. “A” stands for “Aching wound.”<sup>181</sup> Present hurts like shame and guilt can trigger painful feeling of the past. The heart screams out for help.<sup>182</sup>
- d. “G” stands for “Gifts obstructed.”<sup>183</sup> Understand the gifts such as compassion and tenderness are being blocked by the past wounds.<sup>184</sup>

The following steps delineate a compassion practice<sup>185</sup>, also created by Rogers, which can be adopted to help Chinese American Adventist women, and others, cultivate compassion and the feeling of freedom and worthiness to be loved:

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<sup>177</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 72-73.

<sup>178</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 72-73.

<sup>179</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 72-73.

<sup>180</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 72-73.

<sup>181</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 72-73.

<sup>182</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 72-73.

<sup>183</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 72-73.

<sup>184</sup> Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 72-73.

<sup>185</sup> Frank Rogers, “Compassion Practice Exercise,” (lecture, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, October 20, 2014).

1. Locate a safe and comfortable area; allow time for space and silence.
2. Help to ease the individual or the group into practice by focusing on breathing and relaxing their bodies, taking deep breaths, inhaling, and exhaling slowly.
3. After a few deep breaths, invite the individual or group to settle into a gentle rhythm and quiet mind. Facilitate the practice by saying the following, with pauses in between:
  - a. To begin our practice, you are invited to come into the sacred space. Relax your body.
  - b. Take deep breaths. Think of the Holy Spirit's breath filling your lungs as you inhale. When exhaling, release anything that disconnects you from God.
  - c. Allow God's presence to be with your body and soul. As your breathing continues, discern whether there is anything that God is impressing on your heart.<sup>186</sup>
  - d. Feel safe, and rest in God's presence.
  - e. Think of a person or a historic figure who showed compassion to you.<sup>187</sup>
  - f. Remember the face, your experience, your feelings.<sup>188</sup>
  - g. Think of the sacredness who guided these people.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Rogers, "Compassion Practice Exercise."

<sup>187</sup> Rogers, "Compassion Practice Exercise."

<sup>188</sup> Rogers, "Compassion Practice Exercise."



- h. Extend that sacred compassion to yourself, and to the suffering you have experienced.<sup>190</sup>
  - i. “Breathe in that sacred compassion. Breathe out compassion. Repeat 3 times.”
  - j. “Give thanks to God for the compassion/gifts received.”
  - k. “Take a mental note of this moment. You can return to this sacred space any time you want.”
4. At the end of the practice, invite the individual or group to gently come back to the material world. Extend an invitation to linger. Say a short prayer or blessing when appropriate. In subsequent sessions, extend the compassion both to the ones who brought you suffering (strive to see their fears, longing, and wounds), and to the ones who are hurting/suffering in this world.

This practice is helpful because Chinese Adventist churches around the world emphasize obedience and discipline. This means that churches often manipulate the love and compassion of Jesus to obligate members to be involved in the work of the church instead of first receiving the love themselves. The process of recognizing and filling their inner spiritual voids can only begin once they personally connect with the Holy Spirit. I suggest that as Chinese American women practice compassion, it is crucial for them to attend first to their own wounds, before focusing on others’ needs. As noted above, these women are often a combination of voicelessness and marginalization: they are treated as a second-

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<sup>189</sup> Rogers, “Compassion Practice Exercise.”

<sup>190</sup> Rogers, “Compassion Practice Exercise.”

class citizen at home, in society, and at church. Eventually, forgiveness, grounded in compassion, can be granted to parents, siblings, society, and authority figures through this Compassion Practice. To help them to discover more of themselves, other practices, including one called Internal Family Systems, can also be valuable.

### **Internal Family Systems Model towards Healing and Liberation**

The Internal Family Systems (IFS) model was developed by Dr. Richard Schwartz. This model follows a pattern similar to the Family Systems model, and encourages a practice wherein family relationships are understood to form a vital part of the emotional health of each family member. Hence, the Family Systems model supports both families and individuals as they seek to better understand how their family functions; identify strengths and weaknesses within the family system; develop their communication skills; and make the entire family unit stronger.<sup>191</sup>

Schwartz discovered that just as families have conflicts within themselves, individuals can experience different parts within themselves. He developed IFS in response to clients' descriptions of these disparate personality parts. For example, a woman may feel that part of her wants to forgive an offender, but another part of her might want revenge. These parts can be experienced in any number of ways: thoughts, feelings, sensations, images, and more. According to Schwartz,

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<sup>191</sup> M.A. Harris and D. Mertlich, "Piloting home-based behavioral family systems therapy for adolescents with poorly controlled diabetes," *Children's Health Care* 32, no. 1 (2003): 65–79, accessed January 7, 2018, [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15326888CHC3201\\_5](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15326888CHC3201_5).

while experiences affect parts, parts are not created by the experiences. They have always existed, either as potentiality or actuality.<sup>192</sup> All parts mean well for the individual and will use a variety of strategies to “help” within the internal system.

The internal system consists of two primary parts, protectors and exiles. The protectors are the parts one usually encounters first. Their job is to handle the world, and to protect against the pain of the exiles, which tend to feel fragile and vulnerable. Schwartz sub-divides these into Managers and Firefighters. Managers are proactive and social. They are the parts which run the day-to-day life of individuals, so as not to let them feel pain. They mean well, and attempt to keep the individual in control of every situation and relationship, which in turn protects exiles from feeling further hurt or rejection. Their psychic functions include striving, organizing, evaluating, and caretaking.<sup>193</sup>

In contrast, Firefighters are the parts which react when exiles are activated to control and extinguish painful feelings/overwhelming and immobilizing emotions. They have the same goals as Managers (namely, to keep exiles protected), but use different strategies. They are for crisis control and to help at all costs. Their helps come in forms like drug or alcohol use, self-mutilation (e.g., cutting), binge-eating, sex binges, and other harmful behaviors.<sup>194</sup>

Exiles are wounded and/or “young child” parts, which carry and hold the pain of unhealed wounds, unhealed shames, or undeveloped talents and powers

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<sup>192</sup> The Center for Self Leadership, “Self-Leadership,” accessed September 19, 2015, <http://www.selfleadership.org/outline-of-the-Internal-family-systems-model.html>.

<sup>193</sup> The Center for Self Leadership, “Self-Leadership.”

<sup>194</sup> The Center for Self Leadership, “Self-Leadership.”

like dependency, shame, worthlessness, and fear. These parts have usually experienced trauma, and often become isolated or sequestered by the rest of the “family” to protect the individual from feeling the pain, terror, and fear of that trauma. Exiles can also become increasingly extreme and desperate to be cared for, and to tell their story. They long to be heard, healed, and nurtured.<sup>195</sup>

Schwartz also noticed that when the different parts become relaxed, they feel safe and respected, and will eventually cede leadership to one’s internal compass of “wise headship” and/or one’s own True-Self. In developing IFS, Schwartz recognized that, as in the Family Systems model, these various parts assume characteristics and roles within a person’s inner world. When the Self is in leadership (in other words, when one is “Self-Led”), Schwartz claims that “the qualities of the eight Cs”—calmness, curiosity, clarity, compassion, confidence, creativity, courage, and connectedness—are displayed.<sup>196</sup> These qualities emanate from a person’s Innermost Being. The parts are not capable of displaying these characteristics in the absence of Self-Leadership, because they are too busy protecting and managing their leader’s wounds, in the hopes that s/he will not feel hurt when triggered. Thus, IFS helps the individual to locate the source of the particular wound (referred to as exile or “the little girl/boy in the cave”) in need of healing. When the parts are heard, they can begin to relax. Restoration and transformation can happen when one invites in divine presence and healing. This makes IFS a non-pathologizing approach. It offers an alternative understanding of

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<sup>195</sup> The Center for Self Leadership, “Self-Leadership.”

<sup>196</sup> Richard Schwartz, *Introduction to the Internal Family Systems Model*. (Eugene, OR: Trailheads Publications, 2001), 34-46.

psychic functioning and healing that allows for non-traditional techniques in tending to one's hurt and suffering.

### *The Contributions of Internal Family Systems*

A deeper examination of the assumptions driving IFS will further demonstrate the importance of this model to personal healing. Richard Schwartz named the Internal Family Systems (IFS) Model as such based on the idea that each one of us has a family of parts living within us. The assumptions of the IFS Model<sup>197</sup> are as follows:

“It is the nature of the mind to be subdivided into an indeterminate number of subpersonalities or parts. Everyone has multiple energies. Parts remain dormant until internal or external events activate them.”<sup>198</sup>

“As we develop, our parts also develop and form a complex system of interactions among themselves; therefore, systems theory can be applied to the internal system. When the system is reorganized, parts can change rapidly”<sup>199</sup>

“Each person has a Self, and the Self can and should lead the individual's internal system.”<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> The Center for Self Leadership, “Self-Leadership.”

<sup>198</sup> The Center for Self Leadership, “Self-Leadership.”

<sup>199</sup> The Center for Self Leadership, “Self-Leadership.”

<sup>200</sup> The Center for Self Leadership, “Self-Leadership.”

Each part, no matter, how destructive means well “for the individual.

There are no ‘bad’ parts, and the goal of therapy is not to eliminate parts but instead to help them find their non-extreme roles.”<sup>201</sup>

“Changes in the internal system will affect changes in the external system and vice versa.”<sup>202</sup>

“Deeper than any part of us, is a core comprised of clarity, compassion, and groundedness. It is this core which can refuel and resource the Self.”<sup>203</sup>

The goal of inner work is personal restoration: to differentiate the parts from the Self, so that the latter can be an effective leader in the system. This includes healing inner wounds, relaxing extreme parts, gaining emotional freedom, connecting appropriately with others, having clarity, and achieving balance and harmony within the internal system. When the Self is in the lead, the parts will provide input to the Self, but will do so in a way that respects the Self’s ultimate decision-making authority.<sup>204</sup>

Groundedness in Self can also lead to Self-Presence, which is a profound, compassionate connection between one’s inner world and the outer worlds of others. The healing process of IFS includes getting grounded, taking U-turns,

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<sup>201</sup> The Center for Self Leadership, “Self-Leadership.”

<sup>202</sup> Frank Rogers, “Internal Family System” (lecture, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, October 14, 2015).

<sup>203</sup> Rogers, “Internal Family System.”

<sup>204</sup> Frank Rogers, “Internal Family System.”

following the trailheads, tending to the present protectors, and tending to the exiles—the triggered fears and wounds within us.<sup>205</sup>

In summary, Schwartz argues that IFS is important because it “recognizes the multiplicity of the human mind. It is not one unit but is naturally divided into subpersonalities such as pleasers and rebels. These subpersonalities, called parts in IFS, are aspects of our personality that interact internally similar to how people or family members of different ages, talents, and temperaments interact.”<sup>206</sup>

### ***The Application of IFS as a Healing Agent for Chinese American Adventist Women***

Using the Internal Family Systems model in group or individual meetings can facilitate healing for Chinese American Adventist women. Nevertheless, it may not be an easy task to get a group going for them.

#### ***Finding One's Voice***

Chinese people are typically group-oriented and community-based. It is outside of their comfort zone to talk about matters beyond fashion, family, food, and other fun and easy topics. Likewise, and as discussed above, many Chinese American women keep their hurts private. Because young women are often told to “save face” about numerous things for the sake of their family, many have learned to live “double lives.” Thus, they appear outwardly quiet and conforming,

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<sup>205</sup> Frank Rogers, “Internal Family System.”

<sup>206</sup> Richard Schwartz, *Introduction Internal Family Systems Model*, 12–13.

while internally living anxious and unhappy lives. Many well-to-do parents use financial incentives to dictate their daughters' and sons' choices of career and spouse. Although not all Chinese American women experience such parental control, they are almost universally taught not to voice their opinions.

Therefore, the aim of a group session's first meeting is simply to develop a trusting relationship by practicing open, intentional, non-judgmental, and unbiased listening with one another. By creating a safe space in which to hold past experiences, care-seekers can begin to become aware of their voices. The next step is to get grounded by breathing, feeling, or sensing the body in the space. A prayer to invite in God's presence will help the care-seeker to feel safe.

### *Identifying Parts*

As the meeting progresses, the facilitator can begin by identifying one part of the practitioner which needs attention, or by inquiring about two parts which are experiencing tension. The goal is for them to escape enmeshment in these emotions. To this end, a parts map exercise may assist in surfacing the major players in one's life. Tom Holmes' text, *Parts Work*, is a book filled with illustrations in explaining how parts work. Chinese women may find it helpful and are likely to be open to it since it combines deep IFS work with a light-hearted attitude. Also, creating parts map with Chinese visual symbols and even Chinese linguistic expressions relate to and ease any discomfort from revealing any unpleasant parts. It is helpful for practitioners while creating a parts map in identifying their parts and the qualities of True-Self—calmness, clarity, curiosity,



compassion, confidence, courage, creativity, and connectedness.<sup>207</sup> In Chinese, these eight qualities are translated as “*An Jin*,” “*Chin Chuo*,” “*Hao Chi*,” “*Tsi Ai*,” “*Shing Shin*,” “*Yong Chi*,” “*Chuang zao li*,” and “*Lian xi*.”

I have created the following figure as an example of a parts map with the incorporation of familiar Chinese symbols as it hopes to increase interests and expression of feelings.

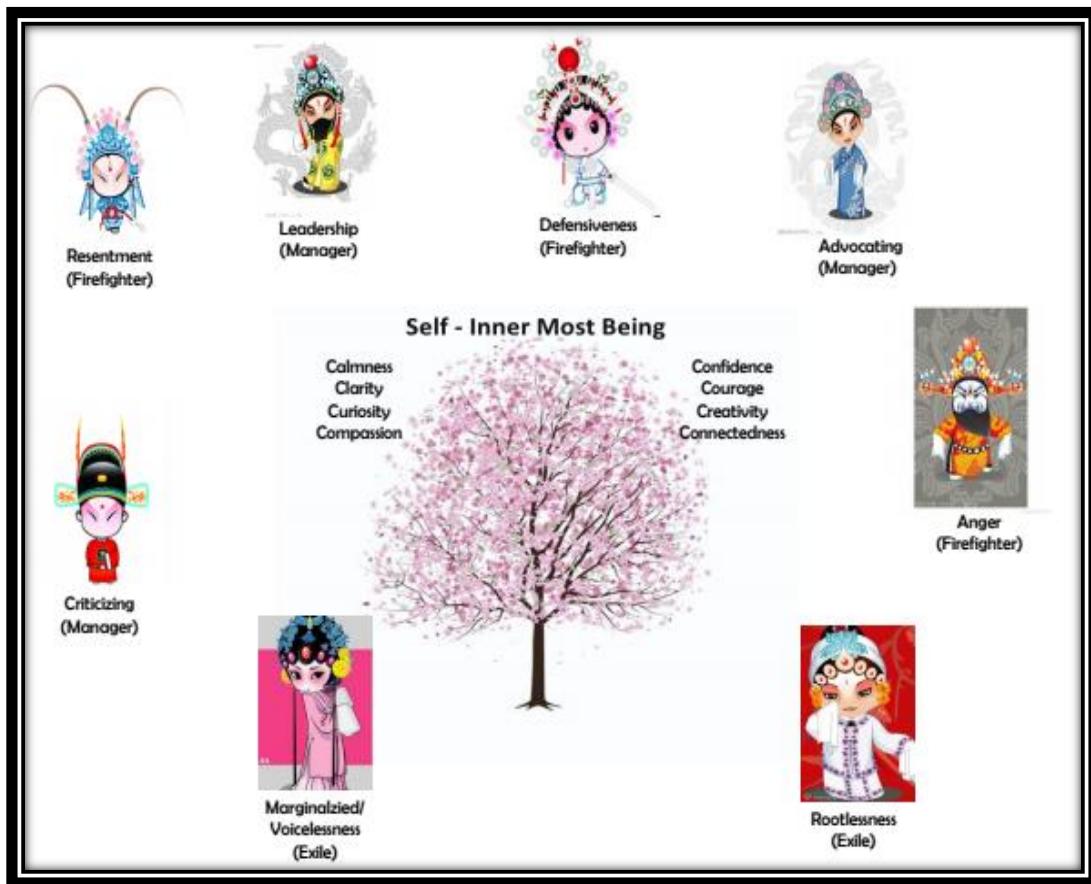


Figure 4.1 Sample parts map with Chinese characters

<sup>207</sup> The Center for Self Leadership, “Self-Leadership.”

### *Addressing Manager Fears and/or Negotiating with Firefighters*

It is helpful for the practitioner to identify which one of their parts is the most afraid, as well as the source of that fear. When appropriate, s/he should converse with this part, and eventually get its permission to tend to the exiles. This may be difficult for individuals from a Chinese cultural background, who may conflate revealing how they were hurt by their parents with betraying their parents.<sup>208</sup>

### *Relaxing the Parts and “Unblending”*

When parts become dominant, they are enmeshed with Self — Blended.<sup>209</sup> Their intentions are to protect and distract the internal system from feeling pain. For example, shame and guilt are ingrained in the Chinese culture largely due to the influence of Confucianism. High achieving or judgmental parts may be prominently active and blended with Self. Steps to explore fears or anger to tend to their parts and exiles can be crucial to their healing. Other steps such as listening to presenting problem(s), identifying the vital parts involved in those problems, unburdening and connecting with exiles, and retrieval of wounded exiles can also be helpful to the wounded Chinese American women.

### *Explaining Exiles and Self-leadership*

The goal of IFS is to heal exiles but also to cultivate Self-leadership. However, it can take several healing sessions to see any transformation in an

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<sup>208</sup> In general, regardless of age a child's loyalty will continue to be with their parents.

<sup>209</sup> The Center for Self Leadership, “Self-Leadership.”

individual. The IFS model recognizes the critical process of respecting each part. The gentle way of following Self can bring healing through a touch of the divine. There are assumptions or expectations of outcome when one approaches for healing: “1) There are wounds created by life; 2) Parts, learning from the past, are awakened to protect and distract the individual from feeling hurt; 3) Healing comes from the divine; 4) Transformation follows after healing.”<sup>210</sup> This practice can be very helpful in discovering and trusting Self. As Adventists believe that healing comes from God, IFS can be an additional resource for them in finding support and healing for the exiles by offering the restorative power of Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit.

### **Healing Practice through Remembering Painful Wounds and Memories**

People often harbor memories so painful that they keep individuals enslaved to a past wound. Those memories usually come to mind often and can cause victims to experience post-traumatic stress symptoms such as anxiety, hostility, despair, and self-isolation. Throughout the history of humanity we see that when God liberates and heals, God does so in a way which reminds us of that divine mercy, companionship, provision, and protection.

Likewise, Chinese American Adventist women can heal by picturing Jesus amidst those painful memories of past events. This practice is about experiencing a divine timeless healing. Time is considered an “indefinite continued progress of

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<sup>210</sup> Frank Rogers, “Tending Our Parts.”

existence and events in the past, present, and future.”<sup>211</sup> As humans live in a physical world, all are subject to the constraints of the space-time dimension. But Christians and practitioners of other faith traditions believe that God transcends time. In the present, God can heal wounds from the past, present, and even future.

A crucial indicator of the existence of a past wound is when one senses a strong negative feeling towards an issue or offender, or when one feels that the Self is not leading. To some, it may be traumatic to remember such wounding. This practice is primarily for those who have been repeating those painful episodes over and over in their minds. The following steps comprise one way to facilitate the use of a Chinese woman’s memories for the purposes of healing her:

1. Explain the practice.
2. Find a safe space and rest on a chair. Pause and take deep breaths.
3. Invite the practitioner to picture the scene in the past as an observer.

Recall the situation. Observe what is going on in her mind.

4. Invite the practitioner to extend her arms and embrace the earlier self.

(Very likely it was a little girl) How does she feel now?

5. Encourage the practitioner to sense her need. Hold her and tell her that, now as an adult, she is there for her.
6. When the time is right, invite the practitioner to imagine that Jesus is holding the adult self as she is holding the younger self.

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<sup>211</sup> Oxford Dictionary, “Time,” last modified March 1, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/>.

7. When appropriate, gently explain, “Jesus was there with you, holding you.

You may not have been aware of it back then. But now you can be sure that He was there with you.”

8. Linger with that feeling and healing as long as wanted or desired.

This practice can be repeated whenever a hurtful memory is remembered.

When one brings their past wound to the healing light of God, the memories most likely will be remembered but the hurtful sting will dissolve in time.

## **Prayers, Reflections, and Other Practices for Healing and Religious Living**

### ***Personal Prayers with a Healing Focus***

Among other spiritual practices, a prayer life is vital for Seventh-day Adventists. Spirituality and discipleship are intended to be a beautiful journey, which enable one to experience, commune with, and walk closely with God. These experiences bring joy and meaning to daily life. And for any Christian to flourish, he or she needs nurturing and direction. Prayer, whether individual or communal, offers individuals the time and space they require to experience such divine connection. Many Christians believe that God longs for us to continue to develop that one-on-one relationship with Him throughout life.

Prayers play a big part in healing. While there are times for voiced prayers, God also invites spiritual beings simply to come into God’s presence, rest in the divine grace, bask in God’s love, yield to God’s guidance, and heal under God’s compassion. Reflective prayers are therefore helpful as they allow us to

focus on God instead of self. This allows God to set the agenda, not the other way around.

Adventists are very familiar with traditional types of voiced prayers. And offering practices that go beyond the regular verbal prayers may bring individuals out of their comfort zone—a state of being which many find uncomfortable. In fact, this feeling could compromise someone's relationship with God, causing her to miss out on the tremendous blessings of healing which may emerge from a deeper walk with the divine. Bearing this in mind, the following Personal Prayer Time Guide has been created to fit the culture of the Chinese American Adventist community. Its guidelines encourage women to embrace an extensive personal prayer practice, which can in turn enhance their everyday connection with God.

### *Personal Prayer Time Sample*

#### Coming into the presence of God

- Come to God in the name of Jesus Christ. Seek Him, not gifts.
- Acknowledge the awesomeness of God – the way God is.
- Quiet all thoughts and desires by taking some deep breaths.
- Feel God's presence.
- Connect with the Holy Spirit.

#### Confession

- Search my heart, confess my sins, and acknowledge my weaknesses.
- Ask for forgiveness through Jesus' blood on Calvary.
- Pray for the cleansing of my soul.
- Allow yourself to settle in with God's grace and mercy.

#### Praises and Thanksgiving

- Contemplate our secured salvation through Jesus Christ.
- Meditate on God's grace.
- Praise God for who God is.

- Be grateful for God's forgiveness.
- Praise the God for the divine love, protection, strength, blessings.
- Rejoice in the Lord and how you are created.
- Sing if your heart overflows with joy.

#### Scriptures

- Memorize a verse or verses from your devotions.
- Meditate on the verse(s).
- Pray for wisdom about the verse(s).

#### God-Focused Prayers

- Pray for God's kingdom to come.
- Pray for God's will to be done on earth.

#### Healing-Focused Prayers

- Pray for understanding.
- Pray for clarity.
- Allow God to be with you.
- Pour out your heart to God.
- Express your pain.
- Allow time just to be.
- Let God be with you.
- Let God slowly heal you.

#### Humanity-Focused Prayers

- Monday—pray for my family and myself (protection, to know God better, etc.).
- Tuesday—pray for people who are suffering and/or in hardship.
- Wednesday—pray for my church families, friends, and relatives.
- Thursday—pray for my workplace.
- Friday—pray for my country, leaders, and our soldiers.
- Sabbath—pray and listen for renewal.
- Sunday—pray for strength, peace, and guidance.

#### Prayer for Others/ Our Country/Our World (when desired)

#### Closing

- Pause and listen.
- Write a prayer journal.
- Thank God for the privilege of communion.

### ***Spiritual Practices for Religious Living***

Besides prayers, Chinese Adventist women can benefit from the following pragmatic practices to enrich their spiritual walk with God. Most Adventists acknowledge the benefits of connecting with God but often lack the pragmatic tools – the “how tos.” The following are only a few examples of spiritual practices, within the confine of Adventist beliefs, as proposals to the Chinese Adventist women.

#### ***Reflections on Scripture***

Scriptural reflection is one of the wonderful ways to pray. The roots of this practice go back to Origen in the third century CE. It has a very ancient history, and a rich Jewish heritage.<sup>212</sup> In Christianity, this practice of scriptural reading and reflective prayer is called “Lectio Divina” (Latin for “divine reading”), and is intended to nurture communion with God and to increase knowledge of God's Word.<sup>213</sup> It does not treat Scripture as texts to be studied, but as the Living Word.<sup>214</sup>

There are many variations of Lectio Divina. Traditionally, it has been divided into five separate steps: silence, reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. After a time of silence, one reads a passage of Scripture, reflects on its meaning, prays in response to it, and then contemplates the Word of God.

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<sup>212</sup> Teresa A. Blyth, *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from many Traditions and Times* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 45.

<sup>213</sup> Marjorie J. Thompson and Evan B. Howard, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 24.

<sup>214</sup> David G. Benner, *Opening to God: Lectio Divina and Life as Prayer* (IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 47–53.



The focus of Lectio Divina is not a theological study of sacred texts but instead a time of relaxation, focused awareness, openness to God's enlightenment, and the like. "Origen taught that the reading of Scripture could help one move beyond elementary thoughts and discover the higher wisdom hidden in the 'Word of God.'"<sup>215</sup> Teresa Blyth, the author of *50 Ways to Pray*, says, "It is to experience a word from God in God's Word."<sup>216</sup>

This kind of scriptural reflection can be practiced individually, or in a group of any size. It can be done whenever and wherever there is a space is available for practice. The reason for reflecting on Scripture is to nurture our souls and focus our minds. It is to discover and develop a vital spiritual rhythm in our daily lives. The steps to Practice Reflective Prayers are as follows:

1. Before leading the reflective prayer, choose a short passage in the Bible and bring it to the gathering.
2. Arrange seats in a circle. Prepare to have pauses in between steps.
3. As the first step of the practice is silence, invite the group to be silent, take deep breaths, relax, and let go of distractions.
4. Read the selected passage slowly and clearly. Repeat it, and invite the group members to take note of a word or phrase which speaks to them.
5. Invite to ponder from the heart the word or phrase that has made such an impact. Remind the group to let those words speak to their lives. Create a

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<sup>215</sup> Raymond Studzinski, *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina* (Michigan: Cistercian Publishing, 2009), 26–35.

<sup>216</sup> Blyth, *50 Ways to Pray*, 46.

space for a deep prayer by letting their feelings be open and honest. Ask questions like, “What gift is God presenting to you right now?”

6. Invite the group to say the word that was felt as a divine gift during the reflection.

7. At the end of the practice, invite them to return gently to the awareness of the material world.<sup>217</sup>

### *Walk and Pray*

Some Adventists enjoy the quietness of indoor calmness. Some enjoy a healthy life style. For physically active people, prayer walks can become an enjoyable part of their daily devotion. Individuals can simply follow a path and walk slowly. The intention is to bring one closer to God while walking and focusing. This practice can be done in a group or alone. The following steps are one of the many possible variations of this practice:

1. Pause at the beginning to invite God’s presence throughout the journey.
2. Decide how far to walk, and identify a turn-around point
3. During the first half of the walk, release any burdens and distractions, pour out your heart to God, and let go of self-control.
4. At the turn-around point, pause and be fully present with God.
5. On your return journey, allow yourself to receive any gifts or insights from God.

Some persons may choose to begin the walk without any agenda, and let God reveal something to them during their journey. Some faith communities have

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<sup>217</sup> Blyth, *50 Ways to Pray*, 46–47.

prayer paths called labyrinths, which may be both indoor and outdoor, and which are meant to facilitate this process. Church pews can be used as an alternative to a labyrinth, with the front of the church serving as the turn-around point. Prayer paths can also be created outdoors with materials like rocks, branches, seaweed, and even plastic utensils. Background worship music can further enhance the experience. Soft lights or candles can likewise add to and/or create an additional element of visual worship.

In a group setting, decide before the practice on guidelines for group etiquette, like causally allowing others to pass. To begin the practice, similar to other mentioned practices, create a sacred and safe space around the prayer path. Welcome the group and introduce the practice briefly. Inform the group of a signal that will mark the end of the practice, if necessary.

Invite the group to pause and think of one item to bring to God during the first half of the journey. Also clarify that it is alright not to have anything at all in mind. Allow time for space and silence. Facilitators can do many different things while the group members walk. For example, they can also walk along the path themselves; they can stand at the starting point to bless the practitioners; or they can just observe the worshippers. At the end of the practice, the facilitator should invite the group to return gently to the material world. S/he should extend an invitation for members to linger and share their experiences.

### ***Reflecting through Art and Music***

Artistic creations like music can enrich one's prayer life. The Adventist community encourages young people to play an instrument. By doing so, they can relax their mind and benefit others while playing. Yet art-based prayer is a foreign concept to many Adventists. The following description intends to foster understanding of such a practice, and in doing so offer another tool for spiritual development.

#### **Music**

Musical prayer is one variation of scriptural reflection. The intention of this practice is to experience God in music, and thereby to nurture communion with the Divine. Like sacred texts, sacred music—hymns and praise songs—can be an instrument for reflection, meditation, and prayer. It invites practitioners to allow God to speak to them, and for them to spend time in the presence of the God.

Traditional devotionals or reflections include words. Music increases the possibility of connecting one's heart deeply with God through emotions, images, and memories. Instead of listening for a word from a passage of Scripture, for example, the practitioner will be listening for pain, gratitude, and many other emotions which music stirs up in the heart. Images such as heaven, gardens, and loved ones can be formed during the practice. With lyrics, transformation can happen with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the words.

Scriptural reflection with music follows a similar facilitation. It can also be practiced individually or in a group of any size. Before the practice, create a sacred and safe space by arranging seats and lighting. Welcome the group and describe the flow of the practice. Invite the group to settle in comfortably and to think of a place which is safe. Allow time for space and silence.

To begin the practice, invite the group to focus on breathing, relaxing their bodies, and sitting in silence. Play the musical selection, pause, and repeat. The second time, invite the group to become aware of any scenes, words, emotions, or memories which the music evokes in them. Invite the group to allow this prayer gift to touch their hearts deeply. Invite the group to sing or hum along to the music.

When the music ends, sit in silence with the group for a while. Invite them to rest in this silence with the scene, word, phrase, or emotion that the music evoked in them. Ask questions with pauses in-between, for example: “What is the scene, word, or emotion saying to you about your life at this point?” “How is it connecting you to your spiritual journey?” “Ask God to reveal that to you.” “You may find yourself moved to prayer spontaneously. Welcome it as a part of life. It is another way being moved to pray.”<sup>218</sup> Then allow more time for silence. Gather the practitioners back into the material world by, for instance, noticing their breath, and asking them to open their eyes when ready. Invite the group to reflect and share briefly about the experience of the practice, verbally or through journaling. At the end of the practice, invite the group to thank God for what they received or noticed during the practice.

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<sup>218</sup> Blyth, *50 Ways to Pray*, 52.

## Decorative Arts

This next prayer practice occurs through the use of decorative art. Chinese people, in general, are not emotionally expressive. Using art as a tool for expression can be less threatening to the participants than simply asking them to express themselves verbally or non-verbally. Colors are important, as they represent certain emotions, societal positions, and occasions. For example, in Chinese culture a golden or bright yellow color represents royalty. Red represents luck and happiness. Black and white colors are avoided during festivals, because they represent death and bad luck.

Engaging in artistic activities like drawing, coloring, painting, sculpting, molding play dough, and arranging sand can be very beneficial for both adults and children. The goal is not to create perfect artwork, but to commune with God through the act of creating art in any form. Participants do not have to “be artistic” to practice. By working with hands, they can open their hearts to God and the Divine love, and express what is gifted to us during the practice. More specifically, creating art allows one to focus on their feelings in the presence of God.

To prepare for facilitation, give thanks to God for all the gifts they have received in life. To begin the practice, for example, with children, explain the tools and/or materials being provided. Invite them to find a quiet place where they can sit comfortably. Play some relaxing music, nature sounds, or “white noise” in the background. Pour a cup of sand (or dry rice) onto a paper or plastic plate.

Provide a chopstick, a skewer, or a pencil. Allow the children to sit quietly and draw squiggles or pictures in the sand using the chopsticks.

As they stay silent, ask them to think about what, if anything, God is telling them at that point. Ask them if their creation has a specific meaning. They are welcome to share, or not to share. Encourage them to engage in this practice regularly, for relaxation and for fun. Close with a brief prayer of thankfulness for spending time with God.

Play dough is another medium we can use for reflective practices. It can be a creative way for participants of all ages to release frustration and tension. Expressions from the heart can come more naturally when one's hands are busy. To begin this practice, provide the participants with one or more small can(s) of play dough. Invite them to squeeze it as hard as they desire into all kinds of shapes. Again, play some calming music in the background. While they are squeezing and shaping the dough, ask them questions such as, "What was the best part of your day?" "What was the low point?" Other type of reflective practices can combine with this spiritual exercise. For example, invite the participants to make something out of the dough—whatever they feel like making. Allow time for creativity.

Afterwards, invite the participants to place their work on a small table provided, and enjoy each person's creation. The colors they choose can also reflect another layer of their mindset. Exploring the colors can be another option for debriefing. Close with a short prayer of thankfulness for spending time with

God. All practices can be done anywhere, with any group of people, with or without a faith tradition. Questions can be tailored to the needs of the group.

Life in America is busy. Many times, women with good intentions will find themselves lacking in self-awareness, and in need of a “pause.” The following tool helps such women realize when and where it is time to take such a pause.

### **Reversing PTSD (DSTP) Assessment Tool**

DSTP is a tool which assesses well-being. It can be particularly helpful for Chinese women, because they are rarely taught or encouraged to love themselves. The acronym “DSTP” comprises an intentional reversal of the letters in “PTSD.”

- “D” stands for deep breathing.
- “S” stands for sensing any physical pain or discomfort, any triggers, and/or any emotion which might keep the practitioner from being emotionally present.
- “T” stands for time-out—for pausing and relaxing.
- “P” stands for placing oneself in God's hands and asking, “What do I need the most right now?” Perhaps it is talking to God, praying, listening to music, eating, sitting, being quiet, walking, or beginning a spiritual practice. If possible, fulfill that need before moving on to another task. If not, make time to accomplish it before the day is over.

In short, Adventism often encourages its members to “love God and others.” Although this is noble, their members, especially women, may think that



it is alright to neglect and forget to take care of their own physical, emotional, and spiritual needs for the sake of tending to others. Although many see self-sacrificing as a virtue, this practice can help to make the transition back to caring for themselves. As a beginner, this practice should occur on a regular basis. The goal is for practitioners to form routines which are sensitive to their need to connect with God on a regular basis.

### **Summary**

This chapter presents several practices as possible everyday ways for the Chinese American Adventist community to find healing and freedom through divine mercy. These pragmatic practices promise to enrich religious living on myriad levels. By making these practices a habit, one may experience fulfillment, liberation, and empowerment to advocate with courage, with clarity, and with a God-gifted voice for self and others. Although these practices are for everyone, their relational nature and focus on connection mean that women will likely be more readily drawn to them than men.

I understand these spiritual practices may not appeal to all Chinese American Adventists, each of whom may experience healing in different ways. By adding various Chinese flavors to these practices, such as familiar and meaningful colors or Chinese-themed music, the participants may find them more inviting. Nonetheless, the introduction of non-traditional practices should be slow and attuned to participants' comfort levels.

Paradoxically, some Adventist leaders may see these Christian practices as foreign and even dangerous. But speaking as a minister myself, I believe that spiritual shepherds have a responsibility to nurture and care creatively for our sheep. These practices are within the confine of Adventist beliefs in bringing the “how to” to the community as it firmly believes in and promotes wholeness living to all communities. It is my hope that these tools can help our members deepen their connections with God.

Chinese people are in general a grateful race; they tend to remember good deeds done to them much longer than the ways in which they were mistreated. Meaningful spiritual practices can help to draw out these ancient, God-given gifts: their long heritage of discipline, obedience, submission, diligence, unity, humility, and compassion, combined with boldness, clarity, confidence, and love.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As healing becomes a possibility for Adventist women, spiritual practices can continue to bring restoration and flourishing through a deepened connection with God. The following chapter concludes this study by offering a theological response to the lived experiences of Chinese immigrant Adventist Women and proposing additional future directions for such flourishing, with the hope of creating a brighter outlook. It begins by naming and building upon existing Chinese cultural practices.

#### **Theological Response to the Lived Experiences of Chinese Adventist Immigrant Women**

Nurturing and healing Chinese Adventist immigrant women will bring a brighter future to the Adventist Church. To enable this, we must create spaces for these women to further connect with God's sustaining and healing power.

Jesus declared in the Gospel of John, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."<sup>219</sup> Our Savior lived a liminal life on earth, witnessed injustice and inequality, and taught humanity how to live in love and harmony with each other. What made this the ultimate Good News was that Jesus welcomed all sinners with a non-judgmental attitude. He continues to heal and forgive many people before they even confess their sins. He stands up for the weak and empowers the marginalized. Before his crucifixion, Jesus introduced God's Spirit to His

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<sup>219</sup> John 14:6 (NIV).

followers; now, this Spirit continues to live within them. Indeed, Christians are to be one with God's Spirit, and thus reap the outcomes of "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."<sup>220</sup>

My favorite narrative in the Bible is about two sisters who loved Jesus. Martha accepted the role assigned to her by culture and society. As a result of inhabiting that role, she also imposed this same set of expectations on her sister. But the other sister, Mary, followed her heart and passion. She took the opportunity to learn from the rabbi. At the time, only men were allowed to do that. Besides fulfilling her societal role, Martha probably also felt that she needed to do something to keep Jesus "around" and to make him feel special.

In the Book of Luke, the author did not mention other guests. Nevertheless, I can imagine that there were others around who were uncomfortable—and were perhaps even frowning at—the specter of a woman learning from a male teacher. Yet Mary had the strength to ignore such negativity because she was not only spending time with Jesus, but liberated by her friend, the King of the universe. As recorded, Jesus invited Martha to experience that same sense of liberation by explaining that, "few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."<sup>221</sup> When Jesus liberated Mary, He liberated all women. What is the outcome of that divine liberation? It is a non-obligated and unstoppable act of pouring oneself out to Jesus, from a heart overflowing with love and gratitude, a heart longing for wholeness.

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<sup>220</sup> Galatian 5:22 (NIV).

<sup>221</sup> Luke 10:42 (NIV).

As a Chinese American Christian feminist postcolonial practical theologian, I embrace both the liberating and healing power of Jesus Christ, and the “Middle-Way” of Daoist philosophy. Liberation, in the Daoists’ framework, should not be a battle between entities. It is not about “us” versus “them.” It instead emphasizes not to be one-sided but work with and complement each other in a harmonious way.

Liberty is a divine installment. Deep within our hearts, there is a natural desire to be free. When an individual becomes one with God, she experiences moral and spiritual clarity, and longs for harmonious living with others. Our world, in general, believes that having a set of basic guidelines is sufficient for good living. But in actuality, guidelines should not determine how one lives; rather, the desire to follow Jesus’ example ought to direct our paths. Only by mimicking Jesus can humanity express its true Godly nature. With this in mind, Chinese American women should embrace a new credo:

With care, I join with those who are extended expressions of God’s nature.  
I connect to the world as I want to be treated.  
I connect to those outside my nature with loving but decisive action.  
To those unwilling to accept me for my true nature, no action is required: I just silently let them be themselves as I remain myself.  
I own nothing; I am merely a passing custodian of items within and outside of my nature.

I believe that God created human nature to seek kindness, wholeness, justice, and peace. Inflicting and experiencing oppression and domination distort our inner being. The longing for liberation cannot be quenched because it is a gift from God. Jesus came to liberate all, and humanity’s path is made straight by becoming free. True healing can produce the clarity and courage to reveal one’s

true nature. After Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, He requested that Peter feed His sheep.<sup>222</sup> As Peter's spiritual successor, a church which proclaims the Good News is charged with a responsibility to watch over these sheep also.

In his dissertation, "Symbols of Dysfunction, Strategies for Renewal," Jeffrey Pugh<sup>223</sup> elaborates on the qualities of a thriving Christian church. Based on his research, I assert that Adventist Chinese churches can be more effective in proving ministry by adopting the following qualities<sup>224</sup>:

1. Unity in love: Recognize that spiritual gifts are from God so that all persons, through their actions, may fulfill God's will.<sup>225</sup> "Meaningful rituals are the unique expression of unity among members and with God. Unity is manifested fully in love and compassion towards self and others. It is not unity for its own sake, but unity for the sake of love, truth, and the glory of God."<sup>226</sup>
2. Authenticity: Each person feels safe to embrace the way they are inspired to be without fear of discrimination.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> John 21:15-17 (NIV).

<sup>223</sup> Jeffrey Pugh is a distinguished professor at Elon University.

<sup>224</sup> Jeff Pugh, "Symbol of Dysfunction, Strategies for Renewal," (PhD diss., Flinders University, 2006), last modified February 2, 2017, <https://flex.flinders.edu.au/file/9de1b967-bb88-4319-9dc2-c35a08af986e/1/Thesis-Pugh-2006-01Abstract.pdf>.

<sup>225</sup> Pugh, "Symbol Dysfunction, Strategies Renewal."

<sup>226</sup> Uriah Kim, "Reading David from an Asian American Context" (seminar, Hartford Seminary, 2011.)

<sup>227</sup> Pugh, "Symbol Dysfunction, Strategies Renewal."

3. Autonomy: Congregants can operate freely as a result of decentralized decision-making structures.<sup>228</sup> They have autonomy for both individually and collaboratively.
4. Diversity: The church celebrates a diversity of gifts and callings. She is a bridge and a place of an inclusive and balanced future for humanity in which she connects everyone through love, respect, and understanding.<sup>229</sup>
5. Flow and liveliness: Structures, institutions, and cultures are not a rigid heritage, but a response to the needs of God's children in the moment, and under the direction of the Holy Spirit.<sup>230</sup>
6. Spiritual/Religious leadership: leadership is only one of the spiritual gifts, and is not meant to be lorded over the leader's community. Rather, a spiritual leader is the glue that binds everyone together to serve as one.<sup>231</sup>
7. Interpretations: Mutual recognition, love, and honoring of one another supplant constructs of presumed authority.<sup>232</sup>
8. Inclusion, collegiality, and harmony: The sole purpose of official roles is to serve others. All members, including female and male spiritual leaders, are equal, for Christ is the only real head.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Pugh, "Symbol Dysfunction, Strategies Renewal."

<sup>229</sup> Pugh, "Symbol Dysfunction, Strategies Renewal."

<sup>230</sup> Pugh, "Symbol Dysfunction, Strategies Renewal."

<sup>231</sup> Pugh, "Symbol Dysfunction, Strategies Renewal."

<sup>232</sup> Pugh, "Symbol Dysfunction, Strategies Renewal."

<sup>233</sup> Pugh, "Symbol Dysfunction, Strategies Renewal."

Faith communities with these qualities reflect God's image. My hope is that the Chinese Adventist community will cultivate "a new generation of spiritual leaders to rekindle the sense of awe, wonder, and beauty in encountering the divine, and to attract others to follow."<sup>234</sup>

### **Interweaving Chinese Culture and Spiritual Practices as Healing Agents for Adventist Chinese American Women**

Many Chinese Americans cherish traditional holidays like Tomb Sweeping Day and Dragon Boat Festival, as they are reminders of their core identity. Although these are not official holidays in the United States, it is common for Chinese Adventist churches to celebrate them with special gatherings. Nurturing thematic practices which link spirituality to these special times can bring familiarity, care, healing, and liberation by affirming their cultural traditions and roots in a foreign land.

New and creative celebrations with Chinese heritage can be offered. For example, popular Daoist exercises such as Tai Chi and Qigong clubs can bring cultural appreciation and health. Creative activities such as "Laughing Clubs,"<sup>235</sup> "Healing Matters"<sup>236</sup> gatherings, mid-week meetings, Compassion Practice gatherings, and Internal Family System sessions can also be enriching and healing. Other gatherings, such as journal writing and sharing clubs, family

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<sup>234</sup> Hunt and Neu, ed., introduction to *New Feminist Christianity*, 9.

<sup>235</sup> The purpose of the "Laughing Club" is to promote relaxation, stress release, and positive attitude in challenging times.

<sup>236</sup> "Healing Matters" is a six-week prayer and healing workshop plan for women within the Adventist Chinese Communities.



retreats, mother-daughter retreats, cultural awareness seminars for immigrant parents, facials or massage sessions with reflection rituals, tea gatherings, and morning and evening walks can bring relevance to the community. The following is a prayer and healing workshop plan, combining most resources mentioned, for Chinese Adventist women.

***A Proposal for a Six-Week Prayer and Healing Workshop Plan for  
Women within the Adventist Chinese Communities***

Among other hurts, immigrant Adventist mothers are likely grieving their own disengagement from their children. Thus, they need support and healing. Second-generation Adventist immigrant women also need a practical healing practice to heal the wounds they have incurred at home and church.

To begin this healing process, I propose a weekly one-hour workshop, to be held on weekends. It would mix reflective prayer, Compassion Practice, and Internal Family Systems, the healing practice through remembering painful wounds and memories as methods and direction. Each session would consist of music, a short story/poem, sharing, meditation/prayer, reflection through journaling, drawing, walking, and the like. Its intent is to create a safe space in which women can recall and process their memories, and hopefully heal at their own pace. The goals of these workshops are two-fold: 1) to connect women with their inner selves, and with other women; 2) to become aware of helpful spiritual tools; 3) to connect with God in an intimate way; 4) to cultivate love and compassion; 5) to heal from past wounds; and 6) to be oneself and thus free to

accept God's calling in life. I will lead as a facilitator without a specific agenda beyond these goals. As the circle of our faith community is small, many people know one another. To preserve emotional safety, then, the following guidelines are useful:

1. The purpose and goal for this workshop is to receive love and divine healing for oneself.
2. This workshop will not involve theological and doctrinal debate.
3. All participants are welcome to speak. Nevertheless, they are also encouraged to be considerate of others' voices and provide space for others to speak.
4. All conversations are confidential.
5. Most remembering and processing will be done in silence.
6. The circle of faith is not a grief support group. Instead, its intention is to nurture healing in the present and future. All participants are expected to arrive promptly and stay for the duration of the meeting. This will help everyone benefit fully from each session.
7. Participants agree to gift others with the freedom to choose whether they wish to publicly share their thoughts, or to keep them private.
8. Participants agree not to try and "fix" others, nor will they offer life advice to fellow participants during or outside of these sessions.

### *Plan for Session One: Compassion for Self*

The first meeting will consist of introductions and brief exercises. The goal for this session is to help the women feel comfortable, and to invite them to experience prayer in an expanded way. I will remind the group of Ellen G. White's writings on prayer in order to remind them that prayer may become an experience of fluid communication with God. Self-compassion is an uncommon mindset among this demographic, so I will find gentle ways to slowly encourage this quality. I will be mindful of instructions for the exercises. For example, some participants may feel uneasy about closing their eyes during prayer, so I will let them know that they are also welcome to keep them open if they wish.

Some women may attend the group just out of curiosity. I realize it is essential that I answer any questions they may have to the extent that I can. I will also distribute anonymous written feedback forms to participants at the end of every session, which can be helpful for mapping or remapping the direction of ensuing sessions.

I propose the following outline for session one:

- Get to know each other: each participant shares what their favorite foods and colors are, and why (10 minutes).
- Come into the presence of God with music (5 minutes): hymn—"Near the Cross"
- Experience story (3-4 minutes): "A Dog Waiting for His Owner"
- Complete verbal sharing exercise (5-10 minutes):

1) Each shares their understanding of compassion.

2) Each recalls a moment when compassion was extended to them.

- Allow for a moment of healing through prayer and reflection (10 minutes): Participants should feel and sense the details of that moment of compassion and kindness. They should notice if a sacred source is present in that moment.
- Pursue self-reflection (10 minutes): private journaling or drawing
- Participate in group-reflection (5-10 minutes): verbal sharing
- Collect feedback and wrap-up (5 minutes). Pass out handout for session two. I will share the following instructions with participants:

1) “Read Psalm 139, in part or whole.”

2) “Reflect on words that ‘pop up.’”

3) “Notice God’s compassion and kindness during your meditation and throughout the day.”

4) “Also notice anything that triggers emotions in you this week.

Feel free to journal about it and bring your thoughts to the group to share next week.”

Before the first meeting comes to an end, I will collect their written feedback. I will also encourage one-on-one conversations regarding the content of, and their response to, the first meeting. There may be some women who really dislike this format. Therefore, having a “debriefing session” with a trusted colleague that week will be helpful for me.

*Plan for Session Two: Understanding Our Parts (Protectors—Firefighters and Managers)*

The second meeting continues the previous week's work and aims to help women expand their compassion for self. Prayer requests can be added to the meeting if the members are ready for closer connection. Questions are expected and encouraged. I will bring Esther's story to this session and I will be sensitive to any unease within the group. The direction of the session will be as follows:

- Remind the group of the participation guidelines (3 minutes).
- Come into the presence of God with music (5 minutes): hymn—"As the Deer"
- Experience story (10 minutes): "My Parts and I." I will explain and model for participants how to welcome their parts by sharing my own parts map.
- Explore poetic reflection (5 minutes): poem—"The Guest House," by Jalal al-Din Rumi
- Complete exercise (5-10 minutes): participants explain their parts. I will ask participants if they would like to share their parts, but I will emphasize that this is not mandatory.
- Ask a question (5-10 minutes): "Which of your parts did you notice this week?"
- Allow for a moment of healing through prayer and reflection (10 minutes): Encourage participants to welcome and show appreciation to their well-meaning parts.
- Pursue self-reflection (5–10 minutes): private journaling or drawing of parts

- Participate in group-reflection (5–10 minutes): verbal sharing
- Collect feedback and wrap-up (5 minutes). Pass out handout for session three. I will share the following instruction with participants:

1) “Create a ‘Parts Map’ of Managers, Firefighters, and Protectors, with the Innermost Being (Self) in the center.”

Women may have questions about creating the “Parts Map.” Some may desire a private sharing of their maps. I will offer one-on-one meeting times as needed, but I will also be clear on my boundaries as a facilitator. Specifically, I will refrain from formal counseling others in-depth due to time constraints.

*Plan for Session Three: Understanding Our Wounds and Hurts*

The women who come to this session show commitment by showing up again, and a deep interest in their own healing. As such, I will open the session by applauding them for their desire to care for themselves. Next, I will facilitate the following components:

- Remind the group of participation guidelines (3 minutes).
- Tai Chi Movements (5 minutes).
- Come into the presence of God with a brief period of silence, and a short prayer of thankfulness.
- Listen to music (5 minutes): hymn—“Amazing Grace”
- Reflect on scripture (10 minutes):

1) One day the Pharisees asked Jesus, “When will the Kingdom of God come?”

Jesus replied, “The Kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For the Kingdom of God is inside of you.”—Luke 17: 20–22

(from the *Newest Interlinear Translation of the Greek New Testament*)

- Complete verbal sharing exercise (5–10 minutes): “Sharing Your Wounds” (optional)
- Explore question: “What wound(s) do you carry from the past? Or from what wounds are you protectors shielding you?”
- Allow for a moment of healing through prayer and reflection (10 minutes): “This is a time to tend to the forgotten wounds (Exiles) by oneself and/or in the presence of Jesus” (aka, a “Healing through Remembering” practice).
- Pursue self-reflection (5–10 minutes): “Draw an image of your wound with colors of your choice. Then draw an embrace of healing around the wound using colors of your choice.”
- Participate in group-reflection (5–10 minutes): verbal sharing
- Collect feedback and wrap-up. (5 minutes): I will explain the Reversing PTSD (DSTP) assessment tool and pass out the DSTP handout for session four. I will suggest that each participant:

1) Take some time each day to tend to her wound(s).

2) Get something special and tangible for her wound(s), if she desires.

*Plan for Session Four: Understanding Our Intimate Relationship*

If the workshop begins in January, by now it will be close to Valentine's Day. Depending on the dynamic of the group, I can be creative and add in snacks, art, or a special exercise.

The flow of the session will be:

- Remind the group of participation guidelines (3 minutes).
- Come into the presence of God with music (5 minutes): hymn—"I Will Be There" by Steve Curtis Chapman
- Allow for a brief silence or say a short prayer (1-2 minutes).
- Experience story (5 minutes): "A Tale of Two Couples" (my two sets of grandparents)
- Complete verbal sharing exercise (10 minutes): "Sharing Your Parts and Wounds in an Intimate Relationship (in Dyads)" (optional)
- Ask questions (10-15 minutes): "Within an intimate relationship, name one interaction or conflict that has consistently triggered you. If you are willing, share with the group what parts of you are being triggered in such interactions. What wounds are these parts protecting you from?"
- Allow for a moment of healing through prayer and reflection (10 minutes): Prompt participants to remember an interaction with their "better halves," which touched their wounds.



- Pursue self-reflection (5 minutes): “What would be helpful to your wound? What do your parts need?”
- Participate in group-reflection (5 minutes): verbal sharing
- Collect feedback and wrap-up (5 minutes). Pass out handout for session five. I will share the following instructions with participants:
  - 1) “This week, imagine yourself engaging your partner once more around the issue you raised this week. What would help you to remain grounded? What would be healing and helpful to your wounds? What do your protector parts need?”
  - 2) Encourage them to try the DSTP assessment model this week.
  - 3) Offer the Personal Prayer Time Guide (in Appendix 1) as a sample of how to structure private encounters with God.

*Plan for Session Five: Compassion Towards Friends and Family*

- Remind the group of participation guidelines (3 minutes).
- Tai Chi Movements ( 5 minutes).
- Come into the presence of God with music (5 minutes): hymn—“The Family of God”
- Allow for a brief silence or say a short prayer (1-2 minutes).
- Experience story (3–4 minutes): recount the biblical story of Mary and Martha, or a story of my struggles as a Chinese daughter.

- Complete verbal sharing exercise (5–10 minutes): participants share their parts and wounds, and note how these operate within a dyad (optional)
- Ask questions (5-10 minutes): “What are the challenges within your inner circle or family? Do you hurt or have any wounds from them?”
- Allow for a moment of healing through prayer and reflection (10 minutes): “Within a relationship, name one interaction or conflict that has consistently triggered you. If you are willing, share with the group what parts are being triggered. What wounds are these parts protecting within you?”
- Pursue self-reflection (5 minutes): I will briefly explain the pressure of forgiveness, and then ask, “What would be helpful to your wound? What do your parts need? Write down those needs.”
- Participate in group-reflection (5 minutes): verbal sharing
- Collect feedback and wrap-up (5 minutes). Pass out handout for session six. I will share the following instructions with participants:
  - 1) “This week, practice self-presence through DSTP practice. Imagine yourself engaging around an issue. Do you sense what would help you to remain calm?”
  - 2) “Notice how your parts are activated when your wounds are threatened or bruised.”
  - 3) “Reassure your pain; find a safe place for it.”
  - 4) “Ask your pain what it fears. See how you can comfortably support it, and your parts.”

It may be appropriate to introduce IFS' "Eight Cs" at this point. If that is the case, I may pass out another handout in preparation for the following week.

*Plan for Session Six: Showing Compassion to Communities and People Who Repel Us*

- Remind the group of participation guidelines (3 minutes).
- Come into the presence of God with music (5 minutes): hymn—"People Need the Lord" by Steve Green
- Experience story (5 minutes): "A Story of a Brave Chinese Immigrant Mother Enduring the Chinese Cultural Revolution"
- Complete verbal sharing exercise (5–10 minutes): "Sharing Your Difficulties Embracing Others" (optional)
- Ask questions (5-10 minutes): "Who caused you pain? Who caused you to fear? Who offended you in the past? Who wounded you in the past?"
- Allow for a moment of healing through prayer and reflection (10–15 minutes):
  - 1) "What would you like to present to God? Journal, draw, or use modeling clay to portray your response."
  - 2) "Is it time to heal?" (I will remind group members that healing is a process.)
- Pursue self-reflection (5–10 minutes): "Is there any healing action that you would like to take now?" (I will remind them that this is only an invitation to act; it is not mandatory that they act.)

- Participate in group-reflection (5–10 minutes): “Is there anything you would like the group to pray for on an ongoing basis?” Alternatively, I may use an exercise involving the “Eight Cs.”
- Collect feedback and wrap-up (5 mins.). Pass out journaling books as keepsakes.

While all six sessions are planned in detail, the schedules are not set in stone. There will be a review after each week’s session in order to determine the group members’ needs for the following week. In addition, I may plan a celebration tea for the last session, where we will recall our journey and share our hopes and visions for the future.

This program can provide Adventist women with much-needed space for quietness, dialogue, reflection on the need to show compassion towards self and others, a vibrant spiritual life, and a deeper connection with other women and God. It may also encourage the voicing of inner desires, sharing of experiences, processing of grief and disappointments, and healing. It will be the first spiritual program specifically tailored to address the need and issues of Chinese American Adventist women. Other similar programs, focusing on different issues, including immigrant daughters’ transition, Asian women clergy, female leadership, child loss and childlessness, “empty nest” motherhood, and stay-at-home motherhood, can also be implemented as needed.

Because Adventists are unfamiliar with non-traditional Adventist practices, the program I propose above may initially face resistance for two reasons. First, a majority of Chinese American Adventist women are unaware of

the existence of additional spiritual practices. Second, they are uncomfortable with unfamiliar rituals. Some of this resistance may be overcome once they come to understand that it will lead to a more meaningful spiritual walk with God. It will be important to affirm that the purpose of this program is not to interfere with their Adventist beliefs, but rather to enhance their connection with God through relationship, prayer, and healing. Building trust and rapport with the community is key to enacting this program. Its aim is to have a non-forceful approach, which is why the content of each week contains familiar Adventist traditions like singing and Bible reading.

The ultimate goal of this healing is to enable women to define and embrace their own self-led identities. I hope and dream that Chinese American Adventist women will all someday possess calmness, curiosity, clarity, compassion, confidence, creativity, courage, and connectedness. With those qualities, they can be inspired to create new models of living—models of inclusivity, sensitivity to injustice, agency, visibility, strength, resilience, autonomy, flourishing, and all other forms of beauty which God has imbued in them. These will, in turn, help to facilitate the liberation of others.

### **Hopes and Dreams for the Future**

#### ***East Asian American Feminist Work***

In her research, Asian American theologian Ann Joh reflects on the work of feminists and reiterates the reality of the dominance of heteropatriarchy in the

Christian theological tradition. She agrees that feminist theology must continue to engage sexism in the lives of both women and men. The reality of gender polarization needs to be examined in ways that support the re-imagination of the social construction of gender identity.<sup>237</sup>

At the heart of feminist work is the desire to be relevant to the world. More specifically, Joh writes that it must “engage in theoretical analysis at the intersections of gender, race, sexuality, and colonialism so that the kinds of theologizing we do may be relevant to our world...As we remember the past and the present, we must also work to forge an incredibly hope-filled world where there is deep recognition of our inter-dependence.”<sup>238</sup> It takes understanding, love, commitment, and imagination in order to envision and create health and balance in a world which is bound in suffering. It takes a community with wholeness to be a “safe zone” for all.

### ***Re-Examining Kongzi’s Teachings in the Chinese and Asian American Communities***

One of the crucial first steps in bringing security and liberation to Chinese Christian women is to re-examine Kongzi’s teachings on gender roles and the family. Fanggang Yang, in her writing on Confucianism, suggests that when traditions are—or have become—harmful, they need to be challenged.<sup>239</sup> Not all

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<sup>237</sup> W. Anne Joh, “Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality: Integrating the Diverse Politics of Identity into Our Theology,” in *New Feminist Christianity*, 55.

<sup>238</sup> W. Anne Joh, “Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality,” 53.

<sup>239</sup> Fenggang Yang, “Gender and Generation in a Chinese Christian Church,” in *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Border and Boundaries* (NY: New York University Press, 2004), 209–213.

traditions need to be preserved. She further states that there is more to Chinese history than Confucianism. As the world continues to move toward inclusivity and equality, harmful habits of treating females as second-class citizens must be tested against the spirit of Jesus.<sup>240</sup> Adventist Chinese communities need to be reminded that Christ's teaching supersedes the dictates of any native traditions or religions.

### ***Publications and Future Research***

Just as my proposed six-week program enables Adventist Chinese women to dialogue about their struggles and needs, educational workshops for Chinese church pastors or women's ministry leaders can teach leaders how to better understand and serve this population. Books and videos can be made within the denomination to provide training.

Publications that compile narratives of Chinese and/or Asian American Adventist women—especially ones which pay attention to a variety of ages and classes—can also prompt meaningful conversations.

Similarly, future research on undocumented Chinese residents in the US would be useful. This population is vulnerable and requires legal and social assistance. They are often in need of advocacy. Research could help determine and address their needs.

I personally intend to pursue a devotional writing project tentatively entitled, *Healing Her: A Yearlong Journey to Spiritual Restoration, Self-*

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<sup>240</sup> Yang, "Gender Generation Chinese Christian Church," 209–213.

*Compassion, and Inner Beauty.* Section one will be about restoration from anxiety, stress, uncertainty, disappointment, competition, suffering, oppression, violence, voicelessness, loneliness, doubt, regret, fear, failure, shame, guilt, grief, darkness, anger, and awareness. Section two will concern the development of compassion through an exploration of topics such as choice, caring, connection, rest, family, and enemies. Section three will address the growth and beauty by diving into experiences of gratitude, acceptance, authenticity, sacredness, healing, peace, love, laughter, confidence, hope, liberation, and freedom.

Along the same line, young Asian immigrants within and outside of the Adventist community seem to be in need of similar spiritual and emotional care. Future studies on younger East Asian American groups sharing similar lived experiences will be conducted.

Finally, events such as panel discussions at Adventist colleges and universities can also provide opportunities for listening, and for re-imagining traditional constructs so that the Adventist Chinese American community can achieve a more balanced outlook for all genders.

As Chinese American Adventist women continue to struggle with the realities of domination and oppression, healing tools and visions of hope are more necessary than ever. Not many of those women can imagine an alternative future at this point. They suffer in ambivalence. Letting the oppressed speak for themselves can seem impossible since they are often unaware of any alternatives. Chinese American women's fundamental right to express their voices, and to ascend to leadership roles at home, at work, at school, and in society at large, still



seem like dreams at this point—and the price for attaining these dreams will be high. Nonetheless, the fight for women’s clarity and courage cannot be abandoned, and my six-session curriculum supports this endeavor. This long journey toward healing and voice will begin with an awareness of injustice, followed by grief, a search for solutions, and practical healing.

### **Reflectivity**

John Creswell describes the concept of “reflectivity” in his book, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Specifically, reflectivity is the attribute of a writer who is “conscious of the biases, values and experience he or she is bringing to the research.”<sup>241</sup> In this vein, I note several shortcomings in this dissertation. First, it covers only a small segment of the US population. Many Asian Americans may share a similar lived experience, but my study does not investigate this possibility. Second, within the Chinese American Adventist community, there are many intersections and sub-cultures to which one might attend. I have addressed only a few of them. Third, the core assumption of my study is that all Chinese American Adventist women are suffering. This assumption leads to the spiritual practices I propose in Chapter Six.

My personal experiences do not make me an expert on the suffering of Chinese Adventist women as a whole. I grew up in an environment rife with marginalization and voicelessness. My lived experiences provided me with the critical foundation and background knowledge necessary to pursue this under-

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<sup>241</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), 214–16.

analyzed topic. However, those knowledge may have caused me to perpetuate some forms of bias in this paper. Therefore, in addition to my own understanding, I sought to lessen the possibility of bias by drawing on numerous bibliographical resources during my research.

### **Final Thoughts**

This dissertation began as a quest to understand the source of the emotional and spiritual needs, struggles, and challenges of middle-class Chinese American women through the critical lens of feminist theologies. It also examined the spiritual beliefs and practices of Seventh-day Adventist Church.

By doing so, this dissertation draws attention to the realities of Chinese immigrant women and their daughters, acknowledges that the healing of these women is incomplete, and proposes additional spiritual practices as healing agents in the hope of fostering creativity, healing, compassion, and flourishing in these women, as well as giving them a voice.

When all is said and done, my hope is that humanity might find common ground out of love for one another through understanding. They can come together to celebrate their differences. Of course, those pursuing these goals must expect to encounter resistance and battles, but I intentionally did not focus at length on these negative possibilities while writing this project. My goal, rather, was to direct all my energy towards the goal of bringing others closer through compassion, which is the heart of God. The capacity to heal is a divine gift which allows each woman to create a brighter future for herself and others through

remembering and envisioning. In this way, the vital effects of such healing can benefit the generations to come. As a faithful Adventist minister, I am grateful to be part of the Adventist community that promotes wholeness and spiritual growth.

Years ago, I came across the work of Jennie S. Knight. She is a practical theologian, religious educator, and ordained Baptist minister. She inspires me through her practical theological attentiveness towards youth that we can uncover trends, confusion, frustration, concerns, dreams, and passions. It is worth considering the fate of future generations in greater depth. Through her writing, Knight advocates for the “transformative” caring of young people. This kind of nurturing is only possible if adults are ready “to understand and... are willing to first look inwardly and do the challenging work of healing, learning to be in authentic relationships.”<sup>242</sup> Only then can they “face communities and youth with a critical yet compassionate lens to take action for social change, to the point of willing to let youth lead in that regards.”<sup>243</sup>

With that advice in mind, it is clear that Chinese Christian women must attend to their own wounds and needs in order to properly nurture their children. Only then will they realize they have a voice and they can heal and flourish spiritually. Jesus and His followers are the examples of their advocates. Jesus treated women equally and broke gender stereotypes. There is both fear and joy in following Jesus as we will not be able to stay in our comfort zone. Historically,

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<sup>242</sup> Jennie S. Knight, “Transformative Listening,” in *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*, ed. Almeda Wright, Mary Elizabeth Moore (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2008), 233.

<sup>243</sup> Jennie S. Knight, “Transformative Listening,” 233.

many forms of Christianity have tried to tame the liberating example set by Jesus through His interactions with women.

Chinese American theologies need to enter into bold, thick, and uncomfortable conversations. To begin with, they need to understand the harmful influence of Confucian philosophy. Second, they need to challenge the necessity of holding on to unjustifiable traditions. Third, they need to confront their fears of change. Chinese religious thinking should be built on love, compassion, and harmony. God instilled that love and power in the hearts of the Chinese long before any missionaries ever arrived. Chinese American spiritual leaders are to maintain the beauty of the complementarity of all things, not assigning of roles, but bringing harmony and balance to each person, couple, family, and community.

My hope and dream is to help imagine and create faith communities which are filled with God's love, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and motivated to share this divine love with others through advocacy, kindness, healing, respect, equality, inclusiveness, relatability, and service. I believe this kind of community served as a "home base" where young people can feel safe, loved, empowered, and a sense of belonging; that it can be a family in Christ, which grows together spiritually; that this branch of the church will become a bridge which supports the first- and second-generations of immigrants as they seek to flourish while still respecting both Asian and American cultures; and that they can be who God inspires them to be.

In conclusion, I share this prayer of mine:

*Dear loving God, you have created in me uniqueness. I am created as your child, your daughter. You have placed a desire in me to follow Jesus and to serve. More than to serve, I am to love and to seek justice. It has not been an easy journey. You see the hardship I endured. You see me fail and flourish. You know my wounds and you gently provide healing.*

*You are my breath of life. Your divine presence is ever with me. You do not forget about me. Your sacred light keeps shining on my path and guiding me. I will continue to let you lead, o God of wisdom. Holy Spirit, empower me with courage, clarity, and compassion. May your will be done in my life.*

APPENDIX 1:  
TWENTY-EIGHT FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS OF SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTISM

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures:

1. The Holy Scriptures - The Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will.
2. The Trinity - there is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. God, who is love, is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation.
3. The Father - God the eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.
4. The Son - God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. By His miracles He manifested God's power and was attested as God's promised

Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to heaven to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things.

5. The Holy Spirit - God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He is as much a person as are the Father and the Son. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. Sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children, He extends spiritual gifts to the church, empowers it to bear witness to Christ, and in harmony with the Scriptures leads it into all truth.

6. Creation - God has revealed in Scripture the authentic and historical account of His creative activity. He created the universe, and in a recent six-day creation the Lord made "the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them" and rested on the seventh day. When the world was finished it was "very good," declaring the glory of God.

7. The Nature of Humanity - Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else.

8. The Great Controversy - All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in

heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation.

9. The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ - In Christ's life of perfect obedience to God's will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life, and the whole creation may better understand the infinite and holy love of the Creator.

10. The Experience of Salvation - In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment.

11. Growing in Christ - By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us.



12. The Church - The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The church derives its authority from Christ, who is the incarnate Word revealed in the Scriptures. The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her.

13. The Remnant and Its Mission - The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness.

14. Unity in the Body of Christ - The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same

faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children.

15. Baptism - By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Savior, become His people, and are received as members by His church.

16. The Lord's Supper - The Lord's Supper is a participation in the emblems of the body and blood of Jesus as an expression of faith in Him, our Lord and Savior. In this experience of communion Christ is present to meet and strengthen His people. The Master ordained the service of foot-washing to signify renewed cleansing, to express a willingness to serve one another in Christ-like humility, and to unite our hearts in love. The communion service is open to all believing Christians.

17. Spiritual Gifts and Ministries - God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts that each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions.

18. The Gift of Prophecy - The Scriptures testify that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church

and we believe it was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. Her writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church.

19. The Law of God - The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age.

20. The Sabbath - The gracious Creator, after the six days of Creation, rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another.

21. Stewardship - We are God's stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use.

22. Christian Behavior - We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life. This means that our amusement and entertainment should

meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty. While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit.

23. Marriage and the Family - Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in

loving companionship. For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between a man and a woman who share a common faith. Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord.

24. Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary - There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle that the Lord set up and not humans. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement.

The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to

have part in the first resurrection. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent.

25. The Second Coming of Christ - The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel.

26. Death and Resurrection - The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is

an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later.

27. The Millennium and the End of Sin - The millennium is the thousand-year reign of Christ with His saints in heaven between the first and second resurrections.

During this time the wicked dead will be judged; the earth will be utterly desolate, without living human inhabitants, but occupied by Satan and his angels. At its close Christ with His saints and the Holy City will descend from heaven to earth.

The unrighteous dead will then be resurrected, and with Satan and his angels will surround the city; but fire from God will consume them and cleanse the earth. The universe will thus be freed of sin and sinners forever.

28. The New Earth - On the new earth, in which righteousness dwells, God will provide an eternal home for the redeemed and a perfect environment for everlasting life, love, joy, and learning in His presence. For here God Himself will dwell with His people, and suffering and death will have passed away. The great controversy will be ended, and sin will be no more.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> “The 28 Fundamental Beliefs,” Adventist, accessed October 16, 2017, <https://www.adventist.org/fileadmin/adventist.org/files/articles/official-statements/28Beliefs-Web.pdf>

## APPENDIX 2:

### EXCERPT OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH'S OFFICIAL STATEMENT ON BIBLE STUDY

The following is excerpted from the Seventh-day Adventist Church's official statement on Bible study:

1. The sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments are the clear, infallible revelation of God's will and His salvation. The Bible is the Word of God, and it alone is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested (2Tim. 3:15, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 2Thess. 3:14; Heb. 4:12).
2. Scripture is an authentic, reliable record of history and God's acts in history. It provides the normative theological interpretation of those acts. The supernatural acts revealed in Scripture are historically true. For example, chapters 1-11 of Genesis are a factual account of historical events.
3. The Bible is not like other books. It is an indivisible blend of the divine and the human. Its record of many details of secular history is integral to its overall purpose to convey salvation history. While at times there may be parallel procedures employed by Bible students to determine historical data, the usual techniques of historical research, based as they are on human presuppositions and focused on the human element, are inadequate for interpreting the Scriptures, which are a blend of the divine and human.

Only a method that fully recognizes the indivisible nature of the Scriptures can avoid a distortion of its message.

4. Human reason is subject to the Bible, not equal to or above it.

Presuppositions regarding the Scriptures must be in harmony with the claims of the Scriptures and subject to correction by them (1Cor. 2:1-6).

God intends that human reason be used to its fullest extent, but within the context and under the authority of His Word rather than independent of it.

5. The revelation of God in all nature, when properly understood, is in harmony with the written Word, and is to be interpreted in the light of Scripture.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> “Bible Study,” Adventist, accessed January 26, 2018, <https://www.adventist.org/en/spirituality/bible-study/>.



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